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Lam, Tom, Sales, Rosemary A., D'Angelo, Alessio, Lin, Xia and Montagna, Nicola ORCID logo ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8170-2770> (2009) The changing Chinese community in London: new migration, new needs. Project Report. Middlesex University: School of Health and Social Sciences, London. . [Monograph]

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FINAL REPORT

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May 2009

1. INTRODUCTION

London's Chinese population in London is one of the most rapidly growing of any national group and is becoming increasingly diverse as new forms of migration develop and people arrive from regions of China which have previously seen little emigration. These developments are a product of political and economic changes in both China and in Britain. The ending of restrictions on travel within China and its growing participation in the global economy have opened up new opportunities for internal and international migration. These new migrants include the most privileged - students, the highly skilled with established jobs in London - as well as those for whom China's transformation to a market economy has meant dispossession and loss of livelihood. Many have been forced to emigrate for survival, often leaving family in China. Britain, with other European countries, has become increasingly dependent on migrant labour but immigration policies are increasingly selective, welcoming those with recognised skills while restricting entry to those deemed unskilled. Many of the new thus migrants find themselves forced to rely on 'agents' to enter the country and their insecure status means they have limited rights once they have arrived and are vulnerable to exploitation. The deaths of 20 Chinese cockle pickers in Morecambe Bay in 2004 drew attention to the 'hidden' population of new Chinese migrants.

Many new migrants prosper and are able to take advantage of the opportunities which migration brings, but others, especially those with insecure legal and economic status, may struggle, often over a protracted period, to gain a foothold in British society. They may speak little English, have limited knowledge of British society and are poorly prepared to settle and find adequate work. They need support in order to access services, but many have little information about how to go about this and limited social networks to help them. Most of the established Chinese population in London migrated to Britain from Hong Kong and speak Cantonese, unlike the predominantly Mandarin-speaking new migrants. They have established a range of community, business and cultural organisations but these mainly cater for earlier generations. Some have struggled to respond to the new needs which these new migrants bring, but they often lack the necessary knowledge, language and resources.

This report is based on research which focused on the experiences of this new population and ways in which service providers could support them in order to promote their inclusion. Although we focus on new migrants, we acknowledge that there is widespread poverty, exclusion and isolation among older generations of Chinese people, particularly as they reach retirement age.

The research included all those identifying their ethnic origin as Chinese, including people from Hong Kong, Taiwan, Thailand and Vietnam. The majority of participants, however, came from mainland China. The study was based in London which has the largest and most diverse Chinese population in Britain and many Chinese organisations. We hope, however, that its findings and recommendations will also be relevant to the Chinese population across Britain.

The research was carried out by researchers based at Middlesex University and working with Chinese community organisations in London. We are grateful to the **Big Lottery Fund** for their financial support and to the School of Health and Social Science at Middlesex University whose contribution ensured that the project was completed. We also wish to thank the informants from Chinese community organisations and the individuals interviewed for the research who have contributed generously with their time and ideas.

2. THE STUDY METHODS

The research was based primarily on qualitative methods in order to explore in depth the experience and needs of this new group. Fieldwork took place mainly in 2007 and included the following methods:

1. **Review and analysis of existing data** on the Chinese population in London to map the Chinese population and the distribution of Chinese community organisations in London.
2. **Focus groups (2)** with *firstly*, leading members of Chinese community organisations and *secondly* a group of new migrants, most of whom had insecure immigration status, held at the offices of a community organisation. These discussed key issues facing new migrants and informed subsequent data collection tools.
3. **Individual interviews with:**
 - **31 recent migrants** with a range of migration status, employment experience, family situation, reason for migration and region of origin to explore their experiences of migration and settlement;
 - **12 service providers from community organisations** with firsthand knowledge of the needs of this group to discuss key issues facing the community.
4. **Short Questionnaires** for individuals to elicit basic information on use of services and reasons why they did or did not use services. 130 were completed.

In selecting our sample of individual interviewees, we aimed to focus particularly on those with higher levels of need and the sample is thus skewed towards those with more insecure social and legal status. Although initially we defined ‘new migrants’ as those who had arrived in the last five years, we found that we needed to be flexible since some participants who have been in Britain for longer were still facing extreme insecurity. We include a pen portrait of these participants who are referred to by pseudonyms (see Appendix 1).

Our key informant interviews were chosen to include a range of organisations, including both those which served a predominantly local clientele and those which were located more centrally and often had a more specialised function. In addition to face-to-face interviews, we also carried out email interviews with some other organisations in order to elicit details of the services which they provide. We list the organisations which participated in interviews and focus groups in Appendix 2. In order to maintain confidentiality, the quotations below are anonymous.

The results of the research and the recommendations were discussed at a launch event held at Middlesex University in November 2008. This involved speakers from the research team and members of Chinese community organisations and participants from Chinese organisations, local authorities and other service providers. The final recommendations take account of this discussion.

The study was carried out in parallel with a research project on London’s Chinatown in which many members of the research team were involved. This project, *Cityscapes of diaspora: images and realities of London’s Chinatown*, was funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council. Some of the key informant interviews were used for both projects and the results of the Chinatown project have helped to inform our interpretation of the results of this project (see also Sales *et. al.*, 2008; Sales *et. al.*, 2009).

3. KEY FINDINGS

The following sections discuss the main findings of the research, focusing particularly on the needs of this new population. We begin by outlining briefly the origin of London's Chinese population and the changes which have occurred in recent years which have brought new challenges as well as opportunities. We then discuss the experiences of our participants, beginning with their motives for migration and their experiences during their journey and on arrival. We then focus on the key issues and problems which they raised: legal status, language, lack of information, employment, accommodation and health. The next section discusses the role of community organisations and their response to the new arrivals. We conclude by discussing the policy implications of these findings and make a series of recommendations aimed at both Chinese organisations and other policy makers.

3.1. THE CHINESE POPULATION IN LONDON

3.1.1. THE HISTORY OF CHINESE SETTLEMENT

London has a long established Chinese population dating back to the nineteenth century (Owen 1994; Chan & Chan 1997; Cheng 1997) and today has one of the most mature and diverse Chinese community in Europe, including a substantial British-born component. The first Chinese migrants to London were sailors who started to arrive in the second half of the nineteenth century and settled mainly in Limehouse, close to the docks. By 1914 there were some 30 Chinese-owned businesses in the area, including restaurants and laundries (Lau, 2002: 5). They faced both popular hostility and official discrimination through the *Aliens Act, 1905* (Holmes, 1988: 80). Contemporary accounts of Chinese 'frequently referred to their exotic or potentially provocative habits such as opium taking, gambling and sexual relations with 'white women' and girls' (May, 1978: 111).

With the decline of shipping and the laundry business and the destruction of Limehouse in the war-time blitz, many Chinese people moved to what is now Chinatown, the Gerrard Street area of Soho which was then run-down and sleazy, notorious as a centre for sex clubs. Low rents made it viable to live and establish businesses there. With the end of the war and colonial restructuring, new migrants flowed in from Hong Kong and the New Territories, with migration peaking in the late 1950s and early 1960s. These new entrants were predominantly male, generally spoke little English and had limited employment opportunities outside 'ethnic' business. They thus provided a cheap supply of labour for Chinatown's businesses which were concentrated on catering.

During the 1950s and 1960s Chinatown remained a 'dangerous' area in which illegal gambling dens proliferated in the basements of buildings along Gerrard Street, often operating in dangerous conditions. As the area prospered, however, Chinese people started to move out of Chinatown and to establish businesses in other parts of London and across Britain. Chinese restaurants have become a feature of virtually every British small town and city.

As they became established, images of the Chinese population began to change. They became viewed as a 'model' community. According to the last Census, for example, Chinese children were the highest achievers of any ethnic group in school examination results (ONS, 2005), while Chinese people do well on socio economic indicators such as income and employment (Song, 2004a:869) and are perceived as making little claim on the state, for example in relation to welfare benefits (Chan *et. al.* 2004: 1). The institutionalisation of London's Chinatown during the 1980s, when it became a central element in Westminster Council's regeneration programme, is also evidence of the changed perception of the population. Chinatown became the acceptable face of multiculturalism and has played an important role in facilitating relations with the government of the People's Republic of China (PRC). The visibility of Chinatown has been accompanied by the 'invisibility' of the population more generally (Sales et al, 2009).

There is, nevertheless, considerable evidence of widespread social and economic exclusion among older generations of migrants (see e.g. Chan *et al.* 2004; Chan, 2002; Chau and Yu, 2002, 2004). This isolation is partly a result of the scattered nature of the population due to the concentration in the restaurant sector. Chau and Yu (2002) suggest that the focus on individual enterprise also isolates many from their own communities as they struggle to secure their market position within a competitive world. This necessitates long hours of work which restricts their opportunities for social interaction (Song, 1999). Individuals also experience exclusion from mainstream society as a result of racism, language and communication difficulties which hinder access to appropriate services, (Yu, 2000) and 'hidden financial problems' (Chan *et al.* 2004:1). Some groups experience particular problems of social isolation, especially if they speak little English, such as women, (Baxter & Raw, 1988; Song, 1995; Lee *et al.* 2002), the elderly (Yu, 2000) and the disabled (Chan, 2002).

3.1.2. NEW MIGRATION

Over the past two decades, the Chinese population has become more diverse in terms of both region of origin and motives for migration, so that the personal experiences and expectations of new migrants differ from those of their predecessors. The more recent arrivals have a diversity of regional origins in Southeast Asia, where economic and political developments have precipitated emigration. Many of the refugees who arrived from Vietnam during the 1970s and 1980s, the so-called 'boat people', were Chinese (Lam and Martin, 1997), while the transfer of sovereignty in Hong Kong in 1997 led to new waves of migration. By the early 1990s, it was estimated that a quarter of Britain's Chinese population were British-born, a third were born in Hong Kong and the rest came from Singapore, Malaysia, Vietnam and mainland China (Storkey and Lewis, 1996).

The most significant developments have been the changed economic and political role of the PRC and its increasing engagement in the global economy. Economic and political reforms from 1978 have brought a new 'emigration regime' (IOM, 1995) which led to a substantial increase and diversification of migration from mainland China. Up to the late 1980s, most of those arriving in Britain from China were sent by the Chinese authorities or educational institutions to promote exchange or undertake postgraduate studies. Some later applied for political asylum, especially after the Tiananmen Square protest in Beijing in 1989. The flow of highly skilled migrants has continued, with people taking up positions in sectors such as IT as well as in government agencies and enterprises from Mainland China (Lee *et al.* 2002; Pieke 2004). This group is expanding as trade with China increases the demand for highly skilled bilingual workers. There are also a growing number of Chinese students, from mainland China and Hong Kong and other South-East Asian countries. Middlesex University, for example, had 2,176 students from this area in 2004, more than half from mainland China.

At the same time, the unevenness of Chinese economic expansion has led to other forms of migration, as poverty has forced people to migrate. From the 1990s onwards, farmers from southern China's Fuzhou and Fuqing coastal areas have emigrated, later joined by people from other regions, notably the Northeast. These areas had lost out in the competition to attract capital investment arising from the reform process, and thus witnessed a shrinking in local industry, bringing high unemployment. Many of these were attracted to the relatively high wages in Chinese restaurants in Britain (IOM, 1995).

A large proportion of these newer migrants have insecure immigration status as immigration policy has become increasingly selective in relation to skills and country of origin (Sales, 2007). Some of those without formal legal status have over-stayed their permission to stay; others enter the country without documentation, or with false documents, using dangerous and difficult routes, as increasing restrictions on entry to Britain have forced people to rely on smugglers. This problem received widespread publicity with the discovery of the bodies of 58 Chinese people in the back of a lorry in Dover in 2000.

While it is often assumed that this group of migrants are predominantly male, 'Chinese women are just as willing as their male counterparts to search for better earnings and a more promising future'

(Song, 2004b: 138). It is also reported that significant numbers of children from China are in the UK without the knowledge of anyone in authority, and are potentially at risk of exploitation and abuse (Somerset, 2004). Many are brought into Britain by traffickers who may continue to exploit them after their arrival. A Home Office report in May 2009 found systematic trafficking of Chinese children to work in prostitution and the drugs trade across Britain. A local authority home has been used as the centre for this trade and at least 77 Chinese children have gone missing since March 2006 from the home.

Many new entrants claim political asylum. Some have been compulsory dispersed while their claim is processes, but others choose to rely on support from friends and community networks rather than face compulsory dispersal. The right of asylum seekers to seek employment was withdrawn in 2002, but many work illegally in highly exploitative conditions. Official policy makes a sharp distinction between 'genuine' refugees, who flee persecution because of their membership of specific groups, and economic migrants. In practice, the distinction is quite blurred (Bloch, 1999) and many from China are 'forced migrants' whose economic circumstances make it impossible to make a living for themselves and their families at home. The narrow official definition of a refugee means, however, that the majority of asylum claims are rejected. Many 'failed asylum seekers', fearing possible repatriation, have gone 'underground' and are surviving within the informal economy. London has also been the major destination for undocumented labour as a result of the diversity of opportunities for informal work.

There is thus a growing number of people from China with insecure status. Many leave family in China and migration involves long periods of separation. In spite of their isolation, this group may not be in contact with either community organisations or mainstream services and are the most 'hard to reach'.

Chan *et. al.* (2004: 30) in study of the use of Chinese community organisations, found that they were an important source of support for Chinese people, with 25% of their respondents using services in the previous year. Most of these organisations, however, were established to meet the needs of older migrants, predominantly from Hong Kong, and their research suggests that they are ill equipped to respond to the needs of newer migrant groups. Most new arrivals speak Mandarin or some Chinese dialect other than Cantonese, as their first language or their main means of communication. Although the most recent arrivals are likely to be most in need of services, they are the least well served by existing services. A limited number of services are offered by a small number of Chinese organisations to new migrants including refugees and asylum-seekers. Traditional service providers, however, are finding the expertise they offer limited in the face of new demands (see for example The Chinese in Britain Forum 2001; Whelan 1999).

3.1.3. LONDON'S CURRENT CHINESE POPULATION

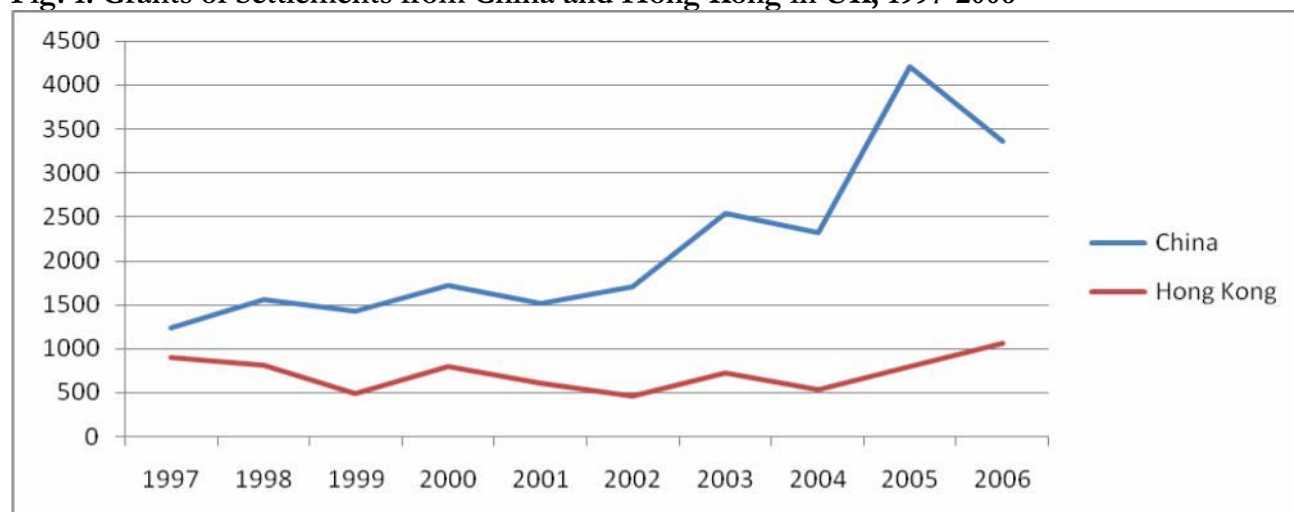
Estimates of the population are difficult, in view of the large number of undocumented migrants and the mobility of the population. The last Census of Population, in 2001, is now eight years old. According to this source, there were a total of 80,206 people of Chinese origin living in London, one in three of the Chinese residents in the UK. Of these 37,104 were born in China or Hong Kong. Chinese people represented 0.4% of the total population, an increase from 0.3% recorded in the previous Census in 1991, and made up 1.1% of the capital's population (ONS, 2005). More recent figures from the Labour Force Survey show that people born in China were one of the fastest growing groups, with their numbers increasing by over 300% in the five years to 2006. Since these figures are based on a survey (rather than the whole population as in the Census) the numbers are too small to obtain reliable figures for London. Like the Census, undocumented migrants are likely to be underrepresented. The figures show that women were in the majority in 2006 as women have entered as labour migrants in their own right, as refugees and through family reunion.

Table 1: United Kingdom - Stock of foreign population by nationality (thousands)

Nationality	1997	2001	2006 all	2006 %women
Ireland	446.0	436.0	335.0	56.4
India	110.0	132.0	258.0	50.4
Poland	..	34.0	209.0	45.9
United States	104.0	148.0	132.0	53.0
France	54.0	82.0	110.0	53.6
South Africa	24.0	68.0	105.0	50.5
Germany	59.0	59.0	91.0	58.2
Australia	62.0	67.0	88.0	50.0
Portugal	27.0	58.0	81.0	53.1
Pakistan	68.0	82.0	78.0	47.4
Zimbabwe	..	20.0	77.0	55.8
Italy	77.0	102.0	76.0	42.1
China	21.0	24.0	73.0	53.4
Philippines	15.0	27.0	71.0	63.4
Nigeria	..	45.0	61.0	44.3
Other countries	999.0	1 203.0	1 547.0	50.3
Total	2 066.0	2 587.0	3 392.0	51.2
<i>China %</i>	<i>1.0</i>	<i>0.9</i>	<i>2.2</i>	<i>104.3</i>

Source: Labour Force Survey (OECD Sopemi)

The Chinese population in London is very scattered ¹ with substantial concentrations only in a small number of boroughs (Westminster, Barnet and Tower Hamlets) which are themselves widely different geographically and socially (see Figure 2 and 3). This also reflects the dispersed nature of the population across Britain as a whole.

Fig. 1: Grants of Settlements from China and Hong Kong in UK, 1997-2006

Source: Home Office

(*) People granted settlement on arrival at ports and those (the majority) initially admitted to the country subject to a time limit that was subsequently removed on application to the Home Office.

¹ The Guardian, 5 May 2009

Fig. 2: Chinese Population* in London Wards

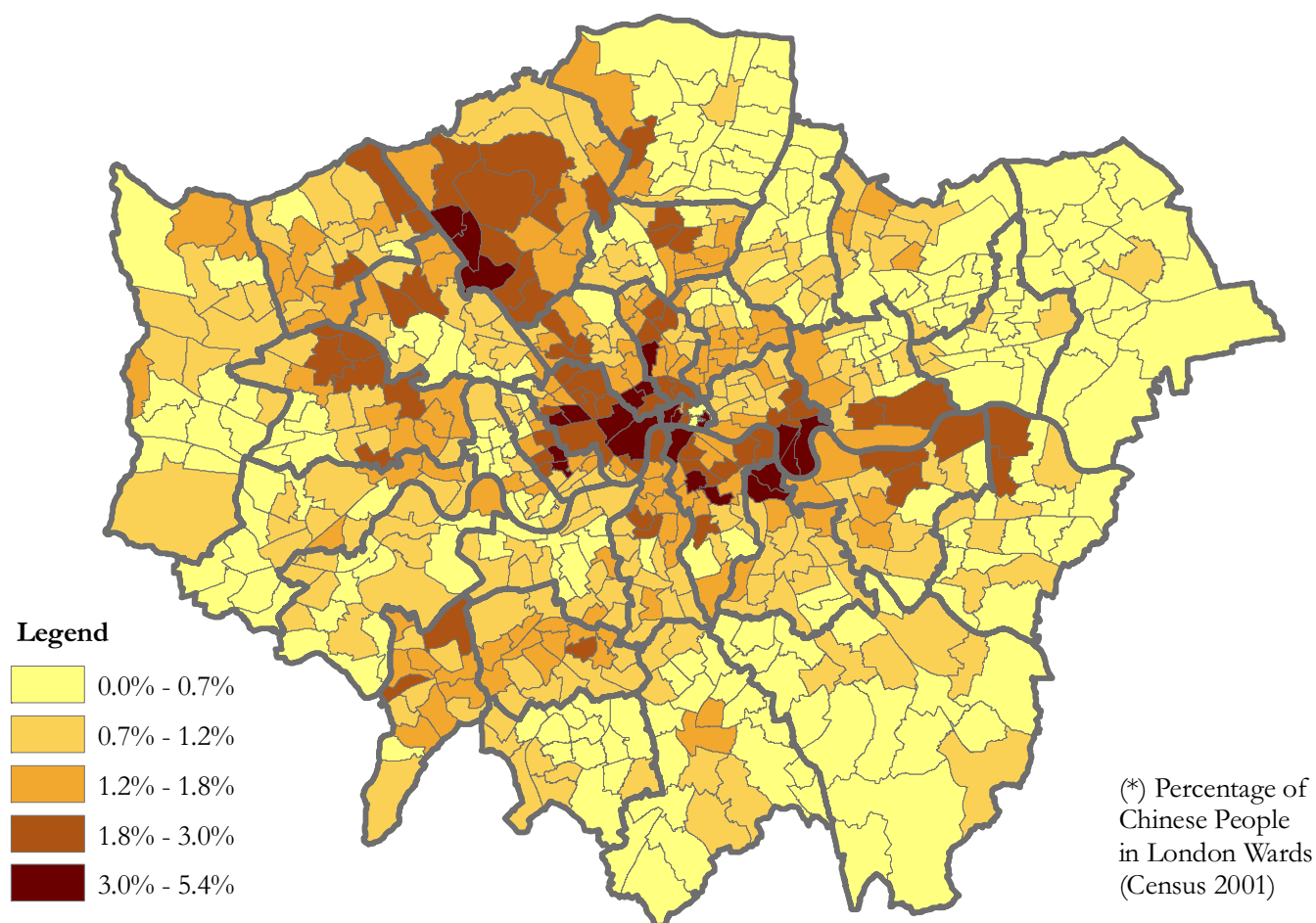


Fig. 3: Chinese Population* in London Boroughs

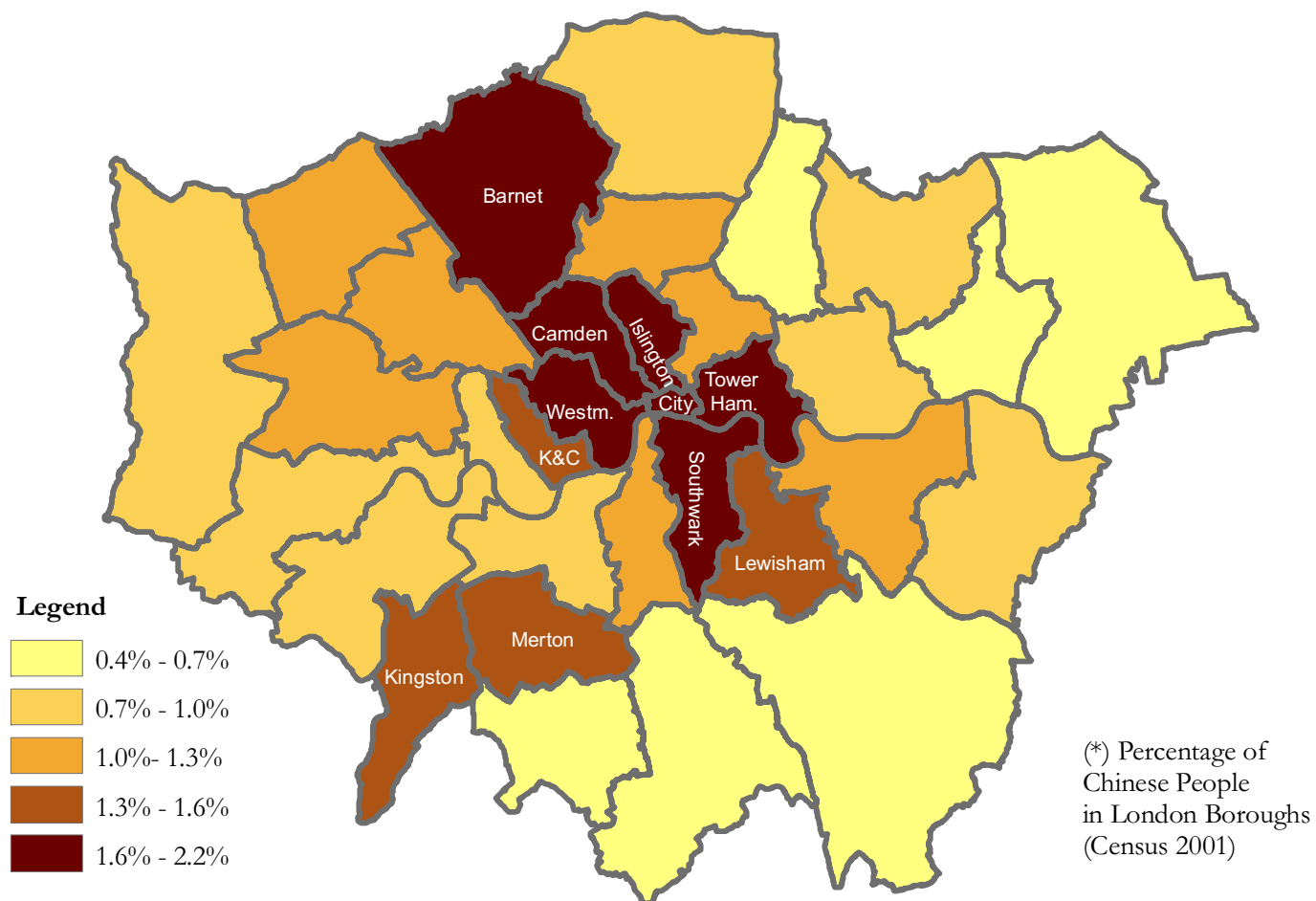
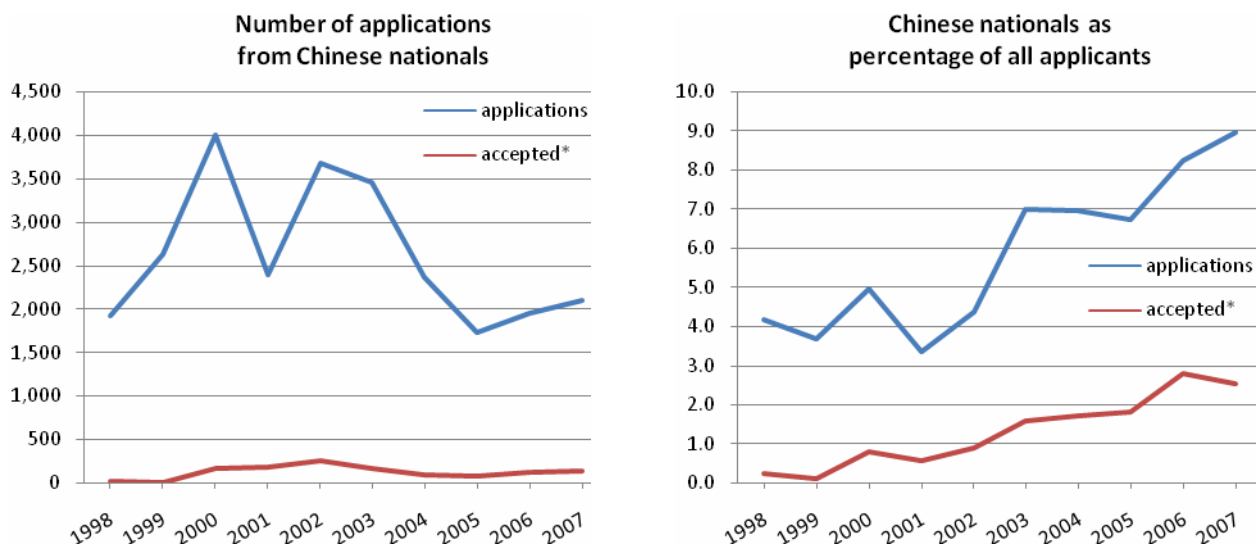


Figure 1 shows that a growing number of people from China have been accepted for permanent settlement. It also illustrates the changing composition of Britain's Chinese population with the numbers from Hong Kong remaining relatively steady since 1997 but the numbers from the PRC increasing, especially up to 2005. Those accepted for settlement are people who have gained secure legal status. At the other end of the scale, however, asylum applications from China have increased, reaching a peak in 2000 (Figure 4). Although they have fallen since then, they have risen as a proportion of total applications, with applications from China now almost 10% of total applications. The success rate, however, is extremely low, and has fallen since 2002, which means that a large number of Chinese people become 'failed asylum seekers', with no legal right to remain in Britain.

Fig. 4: Asylum applications (excluding dependants)



Source: Home Office

(*) Recognized as refugees or given exceptional leave or humanitarian protection on initial decision.

3.2. THE EXPERIENCES OF NEW MIGRANTS

3.2.1. MIGRATION PLANS

I had no intention of coming here... But [life] was very difficult for the family (in China)... I was laid off and my wife had no job. My son had just turned 17 and was in secondary school. In China, for people like us, people in their 40s and 50s, once they are laid off, life is hard. Even getting enough to eat was a problem. I was unable to afford my son's school fees. He needs to go on to Higher Education.

We sold our house and get the money to come here. In a way there was no alternative. It was for my son. I'm already over 40 years old; I have not got anywhere yet; I thought life in retirement would be miserable for me. My child wouldn't respect me; my wife wouldn't respect me. I had done all I could but I could not earn any money. That's why wives don't respect you. That's why divorce rates in China are high these days.

We came here to offer our labour. We do the hardest work; yet we are constantly worried. We spent a lot of money to come here. If we are sent back it would be disastrous, there's no question about it. There is nothing left back there. We had nothing when we left. We have not paid back the money we owe to get here. Going home in that situation would be unthinkable.

(Shu Ming Chen)

Shu Ming Chen's story is typical of many we heard during the course of our interviews. Our respondents came from a variety of backgrounds and had a range of motives for moving to Britain but most faced major challenges in Britain. For many, the move to Britain did not appear to have been freely chosen but was in some way forced, whether by economic circumstances or by direct political threat. Shu Ming Chen made considerable sacrifices to get here, leaving his family and selling his main asset, his house. He now feels trapped, unable to earn enough even to repay the money he spent, let alone to send back savings to help his family. Return would be 'unthinkable' but as an undocumented worker, he is in constant fear of being returned. While he may not be a classic refugee according to the strict criteria of the Geneva Convention, he nevertheless felt that he had no alternative to migration.

Several participants, however, had experienced personal persecution and had fled in order to seek human rights. Na Zhao was involved with Fa-lun Gong, which is banned in the PRC:

I practiced Falun Gong in China but it was not allowed. There was nowhere I could practice. I had to practice Falun Gong otherwise I would feel ill all the time. I would have headaches. So my father asked some friends to help me leave the country.

(Na Zhao)

Others had found themselves in trouble with the officials and felt forced to escape.

I had a problem with the authorities... I lodged a complaint and then the police wanted to arrest meI made enemies... [because] they were corrupt officials and I lodged a complaint [whistle blowing] to report them, so they wanted to arrest me, they wanted to take revenge on me. I escaped.

(Jun Zhou)

Whether they were 'genuine refugees' or economic migrants, they often invested large amounts of money to travel. For some this involved paying agents to provide them with a visa to travel. Many were given 'business visas' which often related to fictitious businesses:

I got a business visa. We asked the agent to arrange it for us. We were supposed to go to a clothes manufacturing company in Scotland but we didn't go. Maybe it was just a bogus company. We didn't care what kind of company it was. I paid the money and as long as they got us the passport [visa] I had what I wanted.

(Xiu Lan Zeng)

Others were smuggled into Britain often through extremely hazardous and uncomfortable journeys as these two men describe:

I got here by land. I travelled inside a big container at the back of a lorry. It took more than a month ... over 40 days. All inside the container. They got food for me.... You pee inside as well... They put me into a container and said we'll take you to a safe place. I don't know which countries I went through. I didn't come out of the container, so I didn't know where I was exactly. I guess it was at sea. I only heard sounds that the container was loading and unloading and they told me that it was safe. (Jun Zhou)

We arrived in Hong Kong from Fujian; from there we flew to Russia. Then the people there took us to climb the mountains... There were over a dozen of us. They were all Chinese but I didn't know them. Everyone was from different places... It was very tough. After that sometimes we travelled by vehicle, sometimes we walked. We got to Holland and we were taken to the beach and put on a ship [I could feel that the ship] was tossed about by the waves. We were inside a container. We didn't hear any noise for some time so we just came out. We didn't know that this was England. The police came to arrest us. They let us to claim refugee asylum. (Tao Wu)

Most respondents left family in China and often faced long periods of separation. This was particularly difficult for those with elderly parents, who they did not expect to see again. Juan Zhou talked of the pain of separation from her sick parents as she came to Britain to try to support her family:

My husband, son and my mother-in law are in China. My mother-in-law is very old; my husband must stay at home to look after her. We are not yet separated. Well he has to wait for me there. My son is 20. I need to send lots of money so that he can study. That was why I wanted to come in the first place. My parents are old and they don't have medical insurance. So I wanted to come to earn money to support them, so that if they have to see doctors in China, there's some support from here. I cry a lot, particularly when I hear that they are ill in China, I feel sad. (Juan Zhou)

Juan Zhou came on a false business visa and is only able to earn limited amounts of money through informal work. Min Zhang came with a genuine work permit but she also experienced difficulties. She spoke of the problem of leaving her career in order to try and improve her position and felt that immigration regulations were preventing her from progressing.

We left our family in China; abandoned our career in China to come here. Why do we want to stay here? Because we want to do something meaningful. We speak Chinese, we speak English and here we can develop our careers and do something meaningful. We possess professional expertise and we want to offer our experience to the outside world. (Min Zhang)

Our respondents contradicted many assumptions about undocumented migrants. Women as well as men travelled alone, often leaving family behind in China. Furthermore, many were not young people hoping to make a new life, but often people in their forties or even fifties who already thought of themselves as old. They felt they needed to uproot their lives in order to support themselves or their family. For many the prime motivation was to support their children through college, to allow them to make a better life.

Few had any preparation for life in Britain. For most their knowledge of the language was extremely limited and this confined their opportunities for employment and settling down. They had little knowledge of what Britain would be like, how to access services and what their rights were and had few established networks. For most, the trip was intended to be short, just long enough to earn money to send home:

I never intended to stay permanently. I thought I'd spend a few years here earning some money and go home. I planned to stay for two years and the money earned in the first year would allow me to pay back the debt, and I'd go home in the second year [with some money]. Before we came we had been told it was easy to earn money abroad but when I arrived here, things turned out to be different ... and the living conditions here were harsh. (Chao Yang)

He found that he could not make as much money as he had expected and ‘before I knew it five years had passed’. He remained separated from his wife but did not feel able to bring her to Britain. He thought the only work she would be able to do would be in a restaurant and that that would be very hard. As he said: *I prefer that I suffer the hardships alone.*

For many respondents, life was lived in limbo with little prospect either of returning to China or of being able to settle in Britain. If they had debts to agents, or had made enemies in authority it would be dangerous to return. They lived extremely harsh and lonely lives, unable to make long term plans because they felt unable to take any kind of decision. Few felt settled and most dreamed of returning home. Ming Li, who had emigrated for social or political reasons could not see any future in China, unless the political situation changed:

If the social situation in China changes... if it means we can stay there without trouble – that we can live in peace, we’d consider going back. (Ming Li)

The more privileged also faced difficulty in becoming established and some had started to settle down only after a difficult initial period. Min Zhang has now started her own business. As she put it:

On the whole it’s not bad. If it wasn’t good, I’d have gone home. So that’s why I’m still here. I’ve been here for five years now. In the beginning ... the first two to three years, it was very difficult for me. It’s now slowly changing for the better. (Min Zhang)

3.2.2. FEELINGS ABOUT LIVING IN BRITAIN

For many people their first experience in Britain was a shock. They had little idea of what to expect and felt disorientated:

I was very homesick. I didn’t speak any English, I didn’t even know how to shop; I could not even buy a bus ticket. I didn’t understand the roads here. They are different to China’s. There are lots of one-way streets in London. It’s not easy for us when we first come. I often got lost and could not find my way home. Then I’d sit in the park and cry. I cried almost every day. I couldn’t do a thing. (Jing Liu)

Min Zhang, described feeling ‘like a little fish in a big ocean’. For many, like Shu Ming Chen, this was related to their marginal status. He has been here over five years but has been unable to settle:

There is no question of us being settled or life being stable. It’s like being everywhere and yet actually being nowhere. We have not been able to find stable employment; we can’t communicate with people. But then, to carry on, we have to face the music. Today we are here and tomorrow we are there... We have no fixed abode. (Shu Ming Chen)

Yan Wang could not imagine feeling at home although she had lived in Britain for some time:

My heart is not there yet. Because I have lived for so long in China and here in the UK, I am far away from home, it does not feel the same. There are always worries. But since you’ve come here to work, whether you are settled or not, as long as you feel that you’re doing it for someone else, you feel OK. (Yan Wang)

Her remarks also illustrate the resilience of many of our participants who spent many years separated from their families. Others, like Fang Wu, a business woman, have more stable legal and economic status and may be able to settle:

I'm very well settled. I came here to study [for] a Masters degree 1997 and I am already settled here. I'm a British citizen. ... I had something to do ... I wanted to study here. Of course settling here is slightly different because it's a different culture. But there was nothing dramatic, nothing completely unmanageable. (Fang Wu)

Even those who had secure status often had problems in gaining a sense that they belonged in London. Jie Huang, a young man with a British passport said he felt a 'stranger' in this society. He remarked that *'people do not get close to each other and just mind their own business'*. This could be particularly problematic for women. Min Zhang has been in London for several years and has a good job, but does not feel that she has integrated:

I have been here so long, yet I have no opportunity, or don't know where, to mix with the locals. ... I feel quite lonely, particularly during festivals like Christmas. I don't know where to go; so I just stay at home alone, feeling very lonely. So sometimes I feel unhappy here, since I don't have a lot of friends around. I'm scared of getting involved with local people because as a woman I feel unsafe with strangers. (Min Zhang)

Like several other respondents, she did not feel safe on London's streets noted. This could restrict their activities, particularly for women. Chinese women, too, are more likely to be outside the official labour market, due to caring responsibilities, and thus have few social contacts. Some are single parents as a representative from the Vietnam Community Association explained:

We have got a lot of Vietnamese women with young children. Some of them came without their husbands, so they are here on their own. They can't speak the language.

Although many spoke of problems, there were also things that they liked about London. Surprisingly perhaps, many liked the weather, preferring the temperate climate to China's more extreme temperatures. Others suggested that British people had good manners which made them feel comfortable. For Juan Zhou, simple acts of politeness from strangers were important

The thing that makes me happiest in London is when you're travelling and people treat you kindly. If there's something that you don't know or if you have heavy luggage, people will come to help you. They will point you to the tube station and tell you which line you need to take ... That makes me very happy. (Juan Zhou)

Others remarked that British people are more professional or as Xia Ying Zheng said *'they do things according to the rules'*. For others, especially those who had come for political reasons, it was a broader sense of security, as Jun Zhou said: *'I knew that it was safe in the UK because here human rights were respected.'* Lei Yuan, who has applied for asylum, said:

I like London's cultural atmosphere. For people from China, we admire the fact that people here respect these values... We have been to the police station, we have been to hospital, and all of them treat us better than they do in China. (Lei Yuan)

Although many spoke of things they liked and disliked about London, for most participants their daily lives absorbed them and they did not seem interested in the specific place. Jun Zhou felt that London was not very different from China: *'Everywhere you see people, you eat, you sleep, you work. People everywhere are having the same daily routine'*. Most had not chosen to come but had migrated through economic or political necessity and were not particularly interested in their surroundings. As Min Zhang said:

When I arrived I didn't do a lot of observation of things around me. So I didn't notice anything in particular. (Min Zhang)

3.2.3. NEW NEEDS

The majority of our participants reported that they had not been able to integrate into British society. As well as problems of homesickness, missing family and cultural disorientation, they faced a number of interrelated problems which made it difficult to settle. The main issues were insecure legal status; lack of knowledge of the language and how to access services; problems with employment, accommodation and health. These intersected, with insecurity preventing people from finding work in the formal sector and language limiting opportunities for employment and access to appropriate services. As Juan Zhou explained:

We don't have [residential] status; that makes it difficult for us to find work. And whenever we find something that we can do, the wage is very low. I am not talking about earning money here, just surviving. (Juan Zhou)

As well as the more 'obvious' needs, our informants raised more hidden issues, such as the problems of isolation and sometimes abuse of women. These issues were also discussed by key informants, who spoke of some of the 'taboos' which prevent people acknowledging problems such as illness or sexuality. Ling Liu, who is married to a British man whom she met in China, finds it difficult to communicate with him and feels isolated. She was reluctant to discuss this in the interview. We did not interview any children but key informants mentioned some of the problems that they could face. The marginalisation of their parents may mean that they suffer social isolation as well as economic hardship. One of our key informants talked about the new migrants living around Chinatown:

It is very difficult for the children. They simply do not have the opportunity to come in the contact with the wider community and the wider world. One of the boys when he first joined here [in a community activity], he is a new arrival, couldn't speak a word of English, couldn't understand Cantonese, only Mandarin. He was very shy.

3.2.3.1. Legal Status

Legal status is fundamental in determining the possibilities open to new migrants and affects every aspect of their lives. Precarious legal status means that people are unable to plan their future, as Tao Wu, whose asylum application had been rejected put it: *I don't have any big plans just yet. I don't have residence status.* Those with more secure status or a permanent leave to remain can make longer term plans. Li Huang now has refugee status and is able to start thinking about setting up a business in the UK which would allow her to move out of the low-paid job she is in:

I am thinking of doing some business (...) I don't have money for that yet. Maybe in about 2 or 3 years time, I should be able to open a takeaway. Well. I'm still interested in doing some business. [So] I won't go home now. I got married last year and my husband is British, so I'll stay here. (Li Huang)

Many of our participants had insecure status. Some had entered clandestinely; others had overstayed their visas, which were often false, while others were awaiting the outcome of asylum applications. This situation dominated their lives. Qiang Lam does not yet have permanent leave to remain and he did not *'feel comfortably settled, so I still feel worried'*. For him, *'the biggest problem, the thing that concerns me most, is whether [I am] allowed to continue living here.'* He relied on what he described as the British government's commitment to human rights, but still felt powerless as his application to remain was being judged by others:

This is of course not up to us; there can be changes and the government can change its policies at any time. But on the whole this [UK] government respects human rights; and this country is ruled by law. (Qiang Lam)

Much evidence has suggested that the refugee determination can be highly erratic (see for example Flynn, 2005; Sales, 2007: 166), an issue which was raised by several informants. Lei Yuan came on false visa and later claimed refugee status. He feels that the immigration authorities do not understand China and thus make wrong decisions. His own application was rejected because his solicitor failed to deliver the correct file. Ming Li came to Britain because he had been arrested for contravening the one child policy, but said:

I didn't understand the way things were done and the procedures needed for applying for legal status; I didn't make the necessary efforts to apply for it. That's why I missed that opportunity (to claim refugee status) (Ming Li)

One of our key informants suggested that many solicitors were also unaware of how to make claims effectively on this issue. He pointed out the 'one child' policy was not in itself counted as grounds for asylum, which had to be claimed on the basis of forced sterilization. He felt that solicitors did not make the effort to find out how to support their clients. As he put it, 'I don't think these solicitors actually care two monkeys about them! They just take their money and go.'

Many of our informants were not entitled to work due to their legal status. Asylum seekers lost the right to employment in 2002 while others were 'undocumented'. They thus rely on informal and often exploitative work or on friends. As Tao Wu said:

The bosses are too afraid to employ people like us because we have not got status. Some bosses may sympathize with us a bit; they know that we don't have status but they would say 'OK, I will give you some work if I have any'. But others don't employ us. So it's difficult to find work. (Tao Wu)

They are also restricted in relation to their access to services. In some cases this is a formal bar, but for many, their lack of status and fear of being deported prevents them taking up services to which they might be entitled. Gang Wong, who is undocumented, said 'I am too scared to see a doctor here'. Lack of permanent legal status can affect other areas of their lives. For Lei Yuan, whose asylum application had been rejected, his status means that his family cannot be reunited. 'This is the biggest problem for me' he said. Many people are legally entitled to be in the UK but are not able to apply for family reunion because they do not have the resources to meet the criteria laid down by the government. This prevents them settling down and keeps them in a form of limbo. Insecure status also means that people are barred from other, more seemingly minor, activities as Lei Yuan explained:

I can't get insurance cover; I can't pay the Road Tax... and many other things... this one issue affects lots of other things. (Lei Yuan)

While undocumented status is the most difficult, some of those who have a legal right to remain in Britain are also restricted in what they can do as these participants in the focus group explained. Xue Li Liang had been in London for seven years and was allowed to work but she did not feel settled:

I still feel life isn't really peaceful because we have not yet been given permanent residence or Home Office papers to say that we can stay. Now I'm working and earn some money but I feel life isn't peaceful. (Xue Li Liang)

Another, Wu Ding, had been granted refugee status but was unable to obtain citizenship because of his poor English. The Refugee Travel Document which was the only form of passport he had cannot be used to travel to China. He was thus trapped in London, unable to visit his family. Others complained of the inflexibility of the system. Feng Song, a student complained of the difficulty of changing a Student Visa to a Work Permit. He was caught in a vicious circle, unable to find work because of his status and thus unable to change that status.

[you cannot change status] unless you have lots of work experience, or you have special skills, or you have [some special] certificate. I have [found work] but it has been difficult. Most employers reject you because you have not got a legal [right to work]. The employer would have to apply for a Work Permit for you so that they can pay tax on your behalf. (Feng Song)

Min Zhang, who had studied for her masters and then started a business, was angry that the rules for the Highly Skilled Migrant Programme had been changed, which had affected some of her friends:

I've invested a lot here, and the business is just beginning to grow a bit. The government suddenly changed the requirement from four to five years. Some of my friends had to go back to China because they were not allowed to stay. So we feel frightened because the government has changed its policies. It's like tearing up a signed contract. (Min Zhang)

3.2.3.2. Language

Most respondents had limited English and are unable to communicate beyond a basic level in a work or social context. The exceptions were students and those with professional backgrounds. This was an issue which cut across gender, region or area (urban and rural) of origin, age and often legal status. Many saw this as their biggest problem in Britain as Jing Yuan explained:

Since coming here the greatest problem is language. The language barrier is the most important. This is greatest problem for me. As for other problems, I think I can overcome them. (Jing Yuan)

Lack of language skills can have severe practical consequences for daily life. Li Chen said that he had problems in reading official letters and thus did not know how to respond. This could cause delay and further difficulties if they missed an important deadline. Xiu Lan Zeng explained how her lack of English, and of familiarity with English language signs, meant that she was unable to find her way around London when she first arrived:

In the first week the three of us tried to go to Chinatown but couldn't find our way. One day we spent over 6 hours travelling all over the place between Zone 2 and Zone 6 and couldn't find it! We didn't know how to travel by underground. We just took the bus. We sat on different buses all day long and couldn't find Chinatown! We didn't speak English so we couldn't ask for directions. The three of us sat on the bus the whole day. (Xiu Lan Zeng)

Inability to speak English means that people become dependent on others. Jun Zhou found that people were helpful in explaining things to him:

If I take a letter to the police station and it turns out to be a hospital letter, they will tell me that I should go the hospital. ... I'd say 'I don't know English' [spoken in English] then they will help me. British people are very nice. They are very kind. If you don't know a place, they will tell you in detail. If I don't understand, I give them a pen and ask them to write down it for me. (Jun Zhou)

Others, however, expressed their frustration at the loss of independence and felt a sense of powerlessness as Li Chen describes:

In China I was able to deal with things on my own. I didn't need an interpreter to see a GP like I do here. Here, if my daughter is not well, I must find an interpreter first. Once you have found an interpreter, you then need to make an appointment with the GP; there's really lots of hassle here. (Li Chen)

Even for people who speak reasonable English there may be misunderstandings as Feng Song, a student, explained:

If there are serious problems, that are difficult to describe, the doctor may have to guess the nature of the problem. They'd ask you a series of questions. Sometimes you find it difficult to answer those questions.... because in the end you are not a native [English speaker]; you can't use the language fluently. This can be a big problem.

(Feng Song)

Language problems also meant that people could become isolated and depressed. Li Huang recalled how she felt when she first arrived. She said that she could normally bear hardships but *'it was the language barrier that almost worn me down.'* Although Jun Zhou was able to get practical help when he needed it, he now feels that he lives in a parallel world, unable to communicate properly with the people around him:

I can't communicate well so I don't know what people may say about me. If people swear at me, I don't understand anyway. I don't give it a damn. Because I don't understand what they say. Likewise, if I swear at them, they won't understand what I'm saying either. (Jun Zhou).

Recent changes to immigration policy have made citizenship and permanent residence, dependent on passing a test on English competence, as well as knowledge of 'life in the UK'. Jun Zhou had taken the test twice and failed.

My English is poor. I may never pass the tests. I have taken the test. But I failed it. Haha...I failed twice. I got 6 answers correct. There were a total of 24 questions. I got 6 right. I didn't understand the questions anyway, I just ticked [the boxes] at random... I'm now 50, if I can't pass it in another 5 years, then another 5, then I may never get a passport (Jun Zhou)

Failure to get a passport means that many are unable to claim the rights associated with citizenship. This shift towards greater conditionality in the granting of citizenship affects the vulnerable most severely since they are most in need of protection. Furthermore, they are most likely, because of their social and personal situations, to have problems in learning a new language. Thus, rather than being seen as facilitating integration, as proposed in the official policy on the integration of refugees (Home Office, 2004), language has become an obstacle to the acquisition of rights.

Problems in learning English

Many of our respondents faced severe difficulties in learning English. These arise from their personal circumstances as well as the fundamental differences between Chinese and European languages. Chinese languages use a totally different writing system, based on pictograms which represent whole words, while European languages use words made up of a number of letters. English script thus looks completely alien to a Chinese person, who may have no point of reference which they can recognise. As Li Huang said, when she first arrived she didn't speak a word of English. She did not even know the English alphabet. There is also a different way of organising the structure of sentences:

The [English] language, its word order is different from Chinese. In Chinese we say the reason first and the result of it later. But in English, it's the reverse. (Xia Ying Zheng)

Gaining some degree of proficiency thus requires enormous effort which many new migrants may not have the time or resources for. The withdrawal of free language classes for asylum seekers makes it impossible for some to attend, especially those like Na Zhao who has a young child. As she said, *'They told us to pay for the course but where would I get the money for it?'*

For others, the emotional impact of unsettled status was the main barrier to learning. Qiang Lam said ‘*I don’t feel relaxed enough to attend class*’. This issue was discussed at length by participants in the focus group with new migrants. Xue Li Liang emphasised her lack of security, both in terms of legal status and income, which he felt prevented him from learning English:

There would be problems [if we wanted to] learn English now because life is not secure. We have to sacrifice [the opportunity to study in order] to take care of our family and feed ourselves. If we are given residence status and even a little income support by the government, we will then feel secure enough to attend classes. But now you just don’t feel enough at ease to attend classes, because life is not secure. (Xue Li Liang)

For others, attending classes was impossible because of the need to work long hours in order to survive. Yang Liu has permanent residence but is still unable to attend classes because of the conflict with work:

Since I had to work I had no time to learn [English]. If I wanted to study, then I wouldn’t be able to work. I worked during the day. When I finished work at 5 o’clock, I had to eat my dinner. By that time there wouldn’t be any class. So I didn’t have time to learn [English]. (Yang Liu)

Others worked such long hours that they had almost no leisure time and attending a class would have been impossible. Jun Zhou gave up classes in order to take up a job:

I’d just started a course and had just learnt the alphabet and then a job came up. I had to leave the class to work. You must go to work. So [even if you are in class] and then suddenly [a restaurant] needs a kitchen labourer, you’d run for the job. (Jun Zhou)

Many respondents felt that their age meant that learning English was too difficult for them. Shu Ming Chen was only in his forties, but – like other respondents in this age group – he felt that this was already old:

People like us... those who are over the age of 40... we have slow brains... It wasn’t easy for us to learn English when we were in China. Now that we are in the UK, we might be able to say things like “hello” and something like that; it would be impossible for us to learn a lot of English... firstly we have no time; secondly our brain is no good for it now. (Shu Ming Chen)

Jun Zhou also said that he felt too old and decided that it was better to earn money rather than continuing with language classes:

You get headaches a lot... [Because] you’re getting old, your memory is fading. It’s not like when you were at Primary and Secondary school. I’m 50 years old now... My memory is fading... So there are lots of new words but you can’t take it in. [What you’ve learnt this week] will be forgotten in the next. ... Eventually you’d say to yourself “well, instead of attending class, I’d better find work, even physical labour, to earn some money and that’s it”. It’s OK as long as I can make a living. (Jun Zhou)

He stresses the overriding need to make a living in whatever type of work he can find. His comments also raise another problem that many people experience in trying to learn a language through weekly classes. If they do not have the habit of studying, and cannot therefore practice what they learn between classes, they are dependent on remembering what they learnt at the last lesson. Many have had little experience of education in China, and the environment of a classroom is not one in which they can thrive. As Li Chen explained:

I really want to learn the language; but English is very difficult for me. I can't remember what I've learnt. It's also difficult to understand some of the texts; you don't know what they actually mean in Chinese. It's not easy to understand the meanings. (Li Chen)

Another woman, Xia Ying Zheng, spoke of her frustration at being in a class with younger people. She felt that for older people it was better to learn English through the more natural work situation. This would, however, be difficult since for many Chinese migrants, work is an entirely Chinese-speaking environment. Their lack of English thus traps them in a Chinese world which in turn prevents them from gaining the language skills which they need to improve their opportunities.

From a mainly Cantonese to a Mandarin speaker community

As well as trying to learn English, new migrants from China may also have to learn another Chinese language. The established community, and the businesses and organisations which they founded, mostly originate from Hong Kong and so they mainly speak Cantonese or Hakka and other dialects, whereas the new arrivals tend to speak Mandarin and Fujian or other related dialects. This makes it difficult to communicate with potential employers or to access the services of community organisations. Jun Zhou had to give up his work in a Cantonese shop because of the language problem

I don't speak English and I don't speak Cantonese well either... it was difficult to find work. I went to a [Chinese] supermarket and worked there for a few days and then went to another one to work few days there... Since I didn't understand what they said, the bosses would say 'go'. So I just worked for a few days and left. (Jun Zhou)

Some were able to learn some Cantonese as Tao Wu from Fujian who worked in a restaurant explained: 'Since most of the bosses who employed us are from Hong Kong and speak Cantonese, we slowly pick up some Cantonese.' Some older migrants have started to speak some Mandarin, or to employ some Mandarin speakers, in order to communicate with new arrivals. The ownership of business is also changing as some of the older generation retire and sell their restaurants to new arrivals (Sales et al, 2009). Language however remains one of the major barriers between established and new migrants and hinders networks of support.

3.2.3.3. Sources of Information and support

As suggested above, many new arrivals come to London with limited knowledge of Britain: the language, the system and their entitlements. Some have no idea where they are going to end up when they embark on their journey and so cannot make any plans. Others seemed remarkably indifferent to the place where they are travelling to; their priority is to earn money quickly and return home rather than to settle. Most had limited access to sources of information in Britain and relied on informal networks rather than more formal sources of information. Several had come to Britain through agents who provided them with virtually no information about what to expect when they arrived and in some case participants had no idea where their final destination would be. Few used the services of community organisations and most seemed unaware of their existence.

This lack of information contributed to the shock and disorientation many felt on arrival. It also makes people vulnerable when things go wrong and they do not know where to turn for help. Yan Yang, experienced domestic violence. As she said: 'if it was in China, I would have known where to get help – the department or district office that deals with it.' It was not until later that she was to gain support from a community organization and as she said, 'I slowly solved those problem and calmed things down'. Another

problem is that people do not know how the system works and what they are entitled to. As one key informant explained:

Nobody explains to asylum seekers that they need to register with a GP, which is very important. When you get ill you go to see a GP and the GP can refer you to hospital...It is therefore so important that the system here in this country, is explained to all these different groups of Chinese and that they are encouraged to be more proactive rather waiting till it's too late.

The problem is greater for the more vulnerable but even those who speak good English may not understand what their entitlements are. Jian Liang, a student from Taiwan said that he only found out about his entitlement to health care after he had been in Britain for some time. As a student, Jian Liang had access to the internet and could use it to search for information as well as to maintain contact with friends and family. For others, without the opportunity to access the internet and little experience of the technology, this was impossible and they were more reliant on face to face networks.

Informal networks

Many of our participants relied on informal networks - friends or relatives – as sources of information and support. They felt these were easier and safer. As Chao Yan said:

We ask friends for help, too. Say if I have no work, I'd call a friend for help. If the friend has no work, I have to wait [until a job is available]. If I can't wait, the friend may say: Just come over! And then we'd have work.
(Chao Yang)

As well as helping with major problems like finding work and accommodation, friends gave support in everyday activities such as shopping. As Li Chen explained, there were lots of things that were totally new to her and she was forced to rely on friends. Some participants had more English and familiarity with the system and were able to help others. Min Zhang, a professional woman, said she sometimes helps friends with things like opening a bank account or registering with a GP.

Many arrived alone with no close family and friends and relied on more distant contacts. Several described phoning friends of friends when they first arrived as Na Zhao did:

My friends' friend was here. I had her telephone number so I called her. She was from near Fuzhou as well. She was my friend's friend. I didn't know her before. I found her and she let me stay in her flat. I stayed there for 2 days. (Na Zhao)

Others relied on people they meet through work or where they live. Yan Yang said that he asks someone living in the same flat for help when he needs it, although he does not know him well. Feng Song, a student, described asking people for help on the street when he was looking for accommodation. In some cases, important decisions were made as a result of chance meetings as for Jun Zhou who decided to apply for asylum after meeting someone in the street:

One day I was doing some shopping and saw this guy, and we greeted each other and he said 'are you Chinese?' I said 'Yes. I'm Chinese' He said 'When did you arrive?' I said 'Yesterday' and he said 'Oh then you should apply for asylum quickly; otherwise they [the police] might arrest you. So I made an asylum application. (Jun Zhou)

Reliance on friends and acquaintances could be problematic since they may know little more than the person they were helping. As a participant in the focus group said

You may understand English, but in terms of benefits lots of people are not familiar with the field and don't know how to deal with it. After reading a [official] letter you may not understand what it means. (Mei Lin Ma)

Qiang Lam suggested that there is a tradition of giving help among Chinese people:

Chinese people have this notion of compatriotism so we help each other when in need. We all need to survive so we must help each other ... Yes. I had friends who gave me some help, finding accommodation to finding work. I didn't have any close friends before I arrived here. But since we are all Chinese and we are living outside China, we feel the need to help each other. If I met someone I don't know who needs my help, I'll also offer my help if I am able to. (Qiang Lam)

This may not, however, extend to all Chinese people and many talked about much smaller circles, their fellow villagers (*laoxiang*). Several complained about people from different regions who they claimed were untrustworthy:

In the UK Chinese friends are not always trust worthy. Sometimes they can be worse than Westerners. ... I find those from Shen-yang particularly irritating. They are not like [the rest of us]; they just won't help each other like compatriots. Instead of giving help, they make you suffer. The impression I have of those from Shen-yang that they would do anything to sabotage you. (Yan Wang)

Most of the illegal deeds are done by the Fujianese. We Northerners.... the majority of the Northern are law abiding; we are keen on finding permanently work; our aim is to improve the situation of our family (in China), to support our children. (Ping Zeng)

Chinatown as a source of information and support

Chinatown was an important focus of contact and information which was mentioned in many accounts. Several participants described being brought to Chinatown on first arriving in Britain. Li Huang was met by an agent at the airport:

After we came out of the airport he called a black cab. We got to Chinatown. It was very late then, around 9 or 10 PM. Then he left. I waited there for a while and felt lost. I was so helpless. No one seemed to take any notice of me. I did ask some Chinese people there but they answered me in English. I didn't understand what they were saying. Then I saw a group of Chinese people coming out from what I guess was a gambling house. I went to ask them and one of them did speak some Mandarin Chinese. I said I wanted to find a room and he said he could try to see if his friend had one. He called his friend and eventually I found this temporary place to stay. That was a hard experience. (Li Huang)

Jing Yuan was sent to Chinatown by the police, who called her a cab which took her to Chinatown. Another woman, Ya Song, who was taken to Chinatown did not realise where she was at first. She also was able to make contacts there who helped her.

When I first arrived, they took me to a place and when I got out of the car, I began to ask people for help. I asked Chinese people for help. No one took any notice of me. Later I met a [Chinese] student and I asked her where I was. She then told me that it was Chinatown. This student let me stay with her. Occasionally she'd take me to Chinatown and there I met the Fa-lun-gong people. (Ya Song)

Several people described searching for work in Chinatown. Xiu Lan Zeng went from one restaurant to another asking whether they had work. Several free newspapers are available in Chinatown, which

contain job advertisements as well as other information. Yang Liu said ‘I go to [Chinatown] to get the [free] newspapers at least once a week’. It is also a source of more informal information as one key informant explained:

It is a good gathering place, so if you want to organise activities, you go there. If you have something to say, you can speak to people there and the information will spread very quickly among the Chinese community.

Community organisations

For some participants, Chinese community organisations were an important source of support. We contacted some interviewees through these organisations and also held our focus group with new migrants in the offices of a community organisation. Xia Ying Zheng, whose interview took place in the offices of a community organisation, said:

Were it not for the assistance given by the Chinese community organisation I think I might as well have gone home. They let me know where to get help to tackle the problems in this country. What steps to take, what should be the next step and so forth. (Xia Ying Zheng)

Her comments illustrate the importance of gaining useful advice and information on arrival. Most, however, did not know about these organisations and did not understand their role. These responses were typical:

Firstly I didn't know [of their existence]. Second, I didn't know where to find them. No-one told me how to find the Chinese organizations for help... Friends just told me how to get to Chinatown. (Feng Song)

Chinese organisations? What are they? (Gui Ying Li)

Some were reluctant to use them, seeing them as ‘official’ organisations and preferring to rely on more informal networks:

I have never asked for help from Chinese organizations or the Chinese government. I didn't know anything about them. Normally through work we'd meet some people, and when possible we'd ask them for help. (Xiu Lan Zeng)

The need for support was, however, acknowledged. Shu Ming Chen spoke wistfully of the hope of finding an organisation that could sort out his problems.

We are helpless and lonely. That is the real situation we are in. People like us can't wait to have some organization that can help us in the UK. It would be heaven on earth then. (Shu Ming Chen)

Several of our participants used the church as a source of support. For Yang Liu this was where he found help in things like making telephone calls, reading letters and filling in forms. This issue was the focus of much discussion in the focus group. Some felt that they could not go there since it was only for ‘churchgoers, but for Tu Chen you did not have to be a believer:

You can go to the church. It doesn't mean you have to follow the religion; you can just go for a chat... I think it's quite good. (Tu Chen)

3.2.3.4. Employment

Most of our participants were in work and though a small number were in professional occupations, most were in unskilled work, even if they had been in more skilled or even professional work in their country of origin. Poor working conditions were common. Because of communication difficulties most respondents had worked largely within a Chinese-speaking environment, particularly in catering, food processing and agriculture, although their employers were not necessarily Chinese. Many work illegally but the increased surveillance of work places is making this more difficult:

I normally work in the kitchen ... and now because it's watched very closely the bosses don't want to hire us anymore, the employers are scared to hire illegal workers.... And it's difficult to find other types of work.
(Ping Zeng)

Most participants had come to Britain in order to work and to save money to send home, but though most live extremely frugally, few were able to send much money home and many were still indebted. They thus remained trapped in low wage employment like Juan Zhou:

I borrowed money to get here and I must earn some money to pay the debt. I still owe lots of money back home. So I have not considered going back yet. I lost money because I was cheated in China. (Juan Zhou)

Finding work

For most of those who did not have qualifications or language skills, the first place to look for work was with Chinese businesses. Qiang Lam said '*I found work through the help of fellow-countrymen... My Chinese friends recommended me*'. Finding a job was however, difficult for those without networks. Xiu Lan Zeng, who had looked for work in Chinatown, explained:

Since we were new to London, we didn't know what to do; we didn't have friends who could recommend us to the restaurants, we didn't have any suitable skills so finding work was very difficult. (Xiu Lan Zeng)

Li Huang had a similar experience. She said that Chinese supermarkets would only employ people who were recommended by someone who already working there. She had had a few job interviews but never got the job. More often people were dependent on finding work through agents who charged for their services. As Xiu Lan Zeng explained, her earlier attempts at finding work were fruitless:

No-one wanted to hire us. We kept asking the restaurants for work like this for five consecutive days. Then we saw an ad put in a free newspaper by an agent. We contacted him and he let us see this Westerner who ran a restaurant. Then I got a job washing glasses. (Xiu Lan Zeng)

The rate charged by the agent for finding a job was generally between £80 and £150 and they usually had little personal contact with them so little idea of the sort of person they were dealing with:

These agents often sound very good... Actually we don't know how big they are since we don't actually see them. Often after the (initial) contact we would meet them somewhere and pay them the fee, because they have to have the money to find work for us. We pay the money into their bank accounts. They say they are too busy to meet.
(Shu Ming Chen)

Others reported that agents sometimes took people's money without providing a job. Gang Wong said that some of his friends had been cheated by agents: '*When you look for them there is no such office! There is no*

such address. In spite of the risks, many people felt that they had no other option but to use agents. As Chao Yang said, *'there was no alternative. We have to take chances.'*

Although in most cases the fee was paid for finding the job, some agents continued to control the worker and to take a large share of their wages as Lei Yuan found:

I worked in building for a year, and half of my wages were taken by the person who introduced the job to me. I got £70 a day but he gave me only £35. He took half of it...He was Chinese. He's been here for over 20 years. He is from Beijing. ... Each day I should have received £70, but he gave me just £35. Because he knew my employer well
(Lei Yuan)

Sometimes agents provided false documentation for employers. Xiu Lan Zeng was provided with fake refugee papers and her boss accepted this though they knew the papers were false. She said that they like Chinese workers because they are paid the lowest wages but are very hard working. They would therefore hire a group of Chinese workers and an interpreter. She later lost the job as immigration controls on employers were tightened.

For several participants the search for work took them to many parts of Britain and some had moved around between several places. Yan Wang, now working in a Chinese medical centre, said *I have been to small towns as well as big cities here in the UK*. Shu Ming Chen described having worked in *'Cardiff, Leeds, and Portsmouth'*.

Even professional people felt that it was difficult for them to find work. Min Zhang, who had left a career in China to take a postgraduate qualification in London with the hope of working professionally, felt that she was seen as too old by employers in Britain.

When I graduated [from the MBA], I was given the opportunity to find work. But it was very difficult to find employment. I don't know why. Maybe because I had not been here for too long, or because I had problem with the language, or my experience was not good enough. At my age, they [potential employers] might not want to hire me. They don't want to hire somebody doing it from the beginning at my age. I had work-permit but I couldn't find work. There are lots of people like me. So I had to set up a company. (Min Zhang)

Many participants talked of setting up their own business like Min Zhang had done, since finding work was so difficult. Self-employment has been a common way of avoiding the structural discrimination in the labour market and allowing people to make the most of their own skills and experience (Westwood and Bachu, 1998). While Min Zhang had the skills and resources to make this possible, for most of our participants this was an aspiration which was unlikely to be realised in the near future.

Working conditions

Most participants spoke little English and thus even some of those who had qualifications or experience of work in skilled jobs in China were confined to low level work. Jun Zhou, a recognised refugee, has been unable to find suitable work:

I have skills like electric welding, boiler engineering... I have engineering skills... But my [English] language skill is poor, I can't find a suitable job...I don't understand a lot of English so I can't do jobs that require complicated [skills]. (Jun Zhou)

Those who are undocumented have to face an additional hurdle in and generally work in the informal sector where they are vulnerable to exploitation. Many worked in Chinese businesses where the bosses were mainly from Hong Kong. As Shu Ming Chen said

Some are good, some are bad. Some are very bad; some are not so good. They are (ethnic) Chinese. We can only work in Chinese restaurants. I can't work in Westerners' restaurants, because we don't speak the language.

(Shu Ming Chen)

Some had also worked for British people. Chao Yang felt that Chinese and British employers were both as bad as each other:

I have changed jobs many times. My current boss is not too bad by comparison, I've worked there for over six months now. But I have worked in places owned by Westerners, too, and they were disgusting as well. Once I worked in a chicken [processing] factory in southwest England. They demanded refugee papers... We gave them photocopies of refugee papers. But in the end they didn't give us our salary. [They] owe me over £200. They said that the company's accounts were in a mess.... If they don't want to pay you, they can easily invent tens of thousands of excuses. (Chao Yang)

Many reported hard working conditions, with pay well below the national minimum wage of £5.52 per hour at the time the interviews took place (and even further below the London Living Wage of £7.20). Employers were able to take advantage of their lack of knowledge of their rights as with Xiu Lan Zeng: 'The pay was £3 an hour. They said that there was some deduction for tax. So I got only £3 an hour. Qiang Lam appeared almost indifferent to this situation:

As we had just arrived we didn't know much about the situation here. As long as we can use our labour to get something, and as long as we can survive, that's enough for us. We don't know whether the employer pays tax and we don't care. We know very little about this tax thing. It's the employer's job to do it for us. As long as we are concerned, we offer [our labour] in return for survival. (Qiang Lam)

Some worked exceptionally long hours. Ping Zeng claimed to have worked for 26 hours in a row at one time. He worked in a kitchen washing dishes and the average day was 14 or 15 hours. 'There was basically no...rest'. He said, 'There was no bed; we had to sleep on the floor'. It was common for employers to provide food and accommodation – often rudimentary as described here – which meant that the workers did not have to leave the premises and were thus available for longer hours. Chao Yang was working in a Tofu factory at the time of the interview.

I work for over 10 hours a day.... Food and accommodation are included in the salary. It's hard work. It's tiring working in the Tofu factory. I have to use an iron to flatten the Tofu. It's hot and very tiring. (Chao Yang)

Many did piece work and had to work long hours in order to make a living. Yan Wang had worked as an onion picker in the country. The workers were all Chinese and undocumented. They were paid just £3.90 for a basket weighing 100 pounds but it took her the whole day to fill four baskets so her rate of pay would have been less than £2 an hour. She also describes the sexual harassment she encountered:

As soon as I arrived, I was surrounded by lots of men because they hardly saw any women. Seriously (laughing). There were only two women there, including me... and some-one said 'would you like to be with me?' I thought, 'damn, how did I manage to get myself into this wolfs' nest?' (Yan Wang)

The long hours of continuous stressful manual work could lead to health problems. Shu Ming Chen suffered from arthritis as a result of working in a restaurant for eleven or twelve hours a day. He felt that when he first arrived he had had no choice but to do whatever the boss told him, but was now no longer able to work at this pace. Sometimes these conditions and the lack of adequate safety regulations could lead to accidents. A lawyer reported a case he was dealing with in which one of their clients had lost a hand when he tried to fix a machine which was not working. He was working illegally so he could not claim formally for compensation because he would have risked being deported. In this case he had sought advice and an advisor was able to get him some compensation through personal negotiation.

In spite of the harsh conditions, several spoke of feeling pleased to be able to work. As Qiang Lam, who claimed to have worked for up to 38 hours, put it:

You had to feel happy anyway...because you need to survive... You don't care whether the work was heavy or not, because you need to survive... Whether the pay is high or low... is not crucial... we are living in a stable environment... All we want is to offer [our labour], and gain some comfort. (Qiang Lam)

The theme of bearing difficulties was reiterated by many respondents. Ping Zeng said, 'Chinese people we coming here are very hardworking; they are able to bear hardships'. Shu Ming Chen explained:

As time goes by, you become used to it, and it becomes less stressful than before. We really hope to be lucky enough to find a good employer. People like us are not lazy. Each of us would exert all the strength we have in our work. When we find a good boss, we would do whatever we can to perform the tasks. That's mutual assistance. That's why having a good employer is important. Our main hope is to get a stable job! ... As long as the job is stable and allows us to earn money, we don't care how hard, how dirty, how tiring it is. We do it for our family, for our children. (Shu Ming Chen)

This resignation also reflected the fact that many had little prospect of improving their situation. Chao Yang talked in fatalistic terms of his life:

I don't know if the boss pays [NI] Contributions. I don't care. As long as he employs me, I'll carry on working. There is no long term plan. Most of us working in this environment are like this. We survive day by day. You never know whether one day your boss may tell you to go, they don't like you anymore. (Chao Yang)

Deskilling

Apart from those who had studied in Britain, most of the respondents who had worked in their country of origin were working in lower level occupations in Britain and thus experienced some deskilling. Li Huang, for example, had been an accountant in China but now worked as a homecare worker. Some, however, seemed resigned to this, as Qiang Lam explained:

To some extent, you feel a sense of loss. Because in China we worked in the office, here we do manual work. There is a difference. When came we were prepared for this, prepared for the worst..... You can't say that because you worked in the office before you must do the same here. (Qiang Lam)

Yang Liu used to be a policeman in China and then worked as a cleaner in London, but he felt that his situation has improved in Britain because the employment situation was more organised.

Working here I feel no pressure. There's no pressure in work or in everyday life. I feel comfortable here. I feel that working here is a lot more systematic than in China: What time you start work, what time you finish, what time you go for break. It's a regular routine. In China, you may be asked to work overtime any moment, but then you won't get overtime pay. (Yang Liu)

Yan Wang, a doctor who started working as an agricultural labourer when she first arrived described how her views about her work had changed. Initially she had felt contented to do manual work.

After a full day of picking onions I thought: well I'm a doctor, but I don't feel any pressure; I earn what I can. I felt happy alone, being surrounded by nature.

It was only where her fellow workers talked to her about wasting her skills that she felt she had to move on:

Their comments made me feel sad, because I was no longer young and in China I had been working in a hospital, where we were envied by many people. So I suddenly felt a sense of degradation. I thought I didn't really fit into this environment so I should return to London. (Yan Wang)

Surviving without work

While most of our participants were in employment, around a third of them were not, either because they had domestic responsibilities or they were unable to find work. However hard the conditions, in most cases it was preferable to being out of work. A few who had recognised legal status were entitled to some benefits. For asylum seekers, that amount is very small as Na Zhao, a young woman with a child explained: 'I get £35 each week from the Home Office, and my baby gets another £35. That's it. Others with young children had some support from partners but most of our participants were single and had to rely on friends or on their own savings. Several described how roommates took care of the rent when they were out of work, as Gang Wong said:

If I have not got work for two weeks, at least I don't have to worry about the rent, [my friends can help me]. Here I stay with my friends; I would be able to stay even if I have no work. (Gang Wong)

Gui Ying Li was forced to rely on the money she had earned earlier when she was out of work. Her story describes the trap that many people find themselves in:

It's just surviving. I still owe money to the agent for the visa. I'll pay when I have the money. I can't pay if I have no money. I have not sent money back to my family so far. I have only worked for a short time. When I had no work the first time, I borrowed money from people I knew. (Gui Ying Li)

Because of this situation many participants lived extremely frugal lives. Li Huang, who had shared a room with several friends explained: 'I didn't waste lots of money unnecessarily anyway. I didn't dare to spend a lot. I just spent it on food. So it was kind of enough – with a bit of struggle.' For Gang Wong, talking with family in China was his main expense. He sometimes speaks to his son for over an hour:

This is probably the biggest spending for me since I came here.... I don't smoke; I don't gamble either; and I don't do anything else much, apart from the occasional beer. (Gang Wong)

For Yang Liu, his low income means he is unable to bring in his family. He has permanent leave to remain and since retiring now lives on benefit. He feels this is just about enough for him but would not be able to support a family. He is thus separated from his family who remain in China and has little chance of seeing them in the near future.

3.2.3.5. Accommodation

Housing was a major problem for many participants. Few are eligible for public housing and even those whose legal status means they could apply are unlikely to succeed because of their circumstances. Those with young children are given more priority for housing but most of our participants were too old to have more children. Xia Ying Zheng, who is in her fifties, had heard that having children could get her council housing but she said *it's impossible for me to have children at my age*'. Even fewer have the resources to buy their own accommodation. They are thus dependent on the private rented market and because of

their legal status are often vulnerable to exploitation. Many interviewees reported living in overcrowded conditions as described by Li Huang:

Before I got married I rented a room. £30 a week. Three to four people sleeping in the same room. Each of us paid £30. The room was not very big. Just average size. (Li Huang)

In some cases men and women were even sharing the same room. Ping Zeng said he was in living in very poor condition with five or six people to a room, both men and women. Overcrowding can be especially difficult for people with children. One of our key informants talked about the problem of overcrowding in the area around Chinatown, as new migrants have been attracted to the area. Often a whole family would be living in just one small room.

Na Zhao, an asylum seeker whose accommodation is provided through the Home Office, complained that it is unsuitable for her and her child:

The house is terrible. Nine families live in the flat. My baby and I only have a tiny room. And the 9 families have to share the same kitchen, toilets, washing area. Since I am on the second floor, it's killing me to climb the stairs carrying an 8 month old baby all the time (Na Zhao)

While overcrowding could be problematic, some preferred it since it is cheaper. Like Gang Wong they often shared with people from the same area in China who they felt they could trust:

Several of us share a small room. It's less expensive. I hire a bed for £25 a week. It costs less to share. If you hire a room elsewhere it would cost you over £70. There's nothing else. It's very basic. And those who are sharing are friends, fellow-villagers ... We get on well. If you hire a room elsewhere, you may not know your roommates, and they may discriminate against you... They don't want to have anything to do with you. (Gang Wong)

Sharing with friends also allowed people to help each other when they had no work. For Xiu Lan Zeng, sharing with other woman provided some company and support:

There are four of us sleeping in a bedroom. It's OK for us. All four are women. When someone finds a job, she goes to work; so we are not in the room all the time, it doesn't seem so crowded. But having someone sharing a room may not be too bad. Above all you need people who you can talk to. Otherwise how can you survive? (Xiu Lan Zeng)

Like employment, many found their accommodation through agent. These rooms are often illegally sublet by people who are themselves living illegally. They have no protection against exploitation. Yan Wang described being cheated by her landlord, who did not give her deposit back when she left the flat.

For others, accommodation is in the workplace, often in restaurants or in the tofu factory where Chao Yang lives and works. This makes them doubly dependent on the boss. Jing Yuan, who now works in a Chinese medical centre, described her boss as very kind for allowing her to stay in the centre without paying rent. She reveals, however, how confined her life is:

Since I have not got anywhere else to stay, I stay here in the medicine centre. So every day after seven o'clock when the boss has gone home, I stay here. So I stay in [after 7PM], and can't go out after that. (Jing Yuan)

3.2.3.6. Health

Our participants were mainly new migrants and would have had to be healthy in order to undertake the often difficult and dangerous journeys that many had made. Though some considered themselves old, even in their forties and fifties, most were in reasonable physical health. Their migration had impacted

on their health in various ways. Some said they felt better after arriving in Britain, particularly those who had left China because their freedom had restricted. Ya Song, who had left because she had been unable to practice Fa-long-gong in China, said:

In the past my health was poor. I had problems with my leg... I have rheumatoid arthritis. After practising Falong-gong, my health is improving; so I insist on practising Fa-long-gong. (Ya Song)

Qiang Lam, who says that he suffered unfair treatment in China, feels that his health is better mentally and physically now that he lives in Britain. Others had become ill because of the nature of the stressful and unpleasant work they have had to do in Britain. Chao Yang has headaches from working in a noisy restaurant and Shu Ming Chen has developed arthritis. He insisted, however, that in his situation he could not afford to be ill:

We are scared of getting sick. We pray for good health. We are already very unlucky; and we are penniless. If we fall sick, it would be unthinkable! So we are scared of getting sick. (Shu Ming Chen)

Others spoke of mental health problems. Although some key informants suggested that mental health may be a taboo subject within the Chinese community, this subject was raised by participants in the focus group, several of whom referred to depression. As two put it:

I feel worried to distraction, like immediately breaking down mentally and wanting to jump from the building to kill myself. (Long Zhang)

Work is tiring and there's hardly any proper break, the mind is thinking this and that all the time and you don't even know what you are thinking about. [Each morning] coming out of the door and seeing the situation, it makes you feel that the sky is falling down. There is invisible pressure, troubling [your] mind. I had this feeling when I first came that I had to control myself; there was the feeling that would make you crazy. This (feeling) cannot be described with language. (Ning Wei)

Other participants had suffered from physical complaints requiring medical attention. Many were, however, reluctant to seek medical help. Yan Yang, who has a heart problem, relies on medicine sent by family in China. Others, such as Chao Yang, rely on self-medication:

I'd take some medicine if I've a cold or some minor problems. I've never seen a GP here. Supposing I've got something serious, then I must treat it seriously. Right? I'll run to the hospital for help. I'll call 999 or run for help. There would be no alternative anyway. As long as I can cope myself, I won't go to a hospital. (Chao Yang)

Their reasons were generally a combination of language problems, lack of familiarity with the system and their entitlements, and fear of being detected due to their legal status. These produced fear of becoming entangled in the system, as Gang Wong's statement suggests:

I am too scared to see a doctor here. [Because] they say that it's very complicated to see a doctor. And I don't know if I have to pay to see a doctor. So I'm too scared to go (Gang Wong)

A story recounted by one key informant illustrates the very real dangers that those with undocumented states faced in using the health services:

We had a young man, 28 years old, who went to work in a factory and had his hands cut off [in a machine]. And all they did was take him to hospital, and because of the shock they found that he had diabetes and also

HIV. And then, as a result of his registration with the hospital, he received a letter from the Home Office saying that he should get out.

Several key informants remarked on the failure of new migrants to use the system properly, which could lead to serious problems when they became sick. Like Chao Yang, many did not register with a GP and would use the emergency services if they became ill. Lei Yuan went straight to hospital when he had a problem and the failure to go through the GP system led to a delay in the diagnosis of his complaint:

I have been ill a few times. I didn't know where to look. I just went to hospital. Sometimes there was an interpreter; sometimes there wasn't. Since I had no status, it took them a long long time to sort out this. What I had was some minor problem needing a few days' care. But it took them nearly 5 months to settle it. As a result the pain was prolonged. The main reason was because I had no status, because I had not gone through the proper stages [to register with the NHS]. (Lei Yuan)

Students are entitled to free medical care and often have good information about the GP service provided by their universities. In spite of this, and their better language skills, even they may not understand their entitlements as this key informant pointed out:

Our students are eligible for NHS treatment but I guess 90% of our students did not know that. There is a lack of information. A lot of benefits you are entitled to the students don't know about. One reason is language and the second is the cultural thing. This country has a level of benefits that they have never heard of before.

Those who actually did use the health service generally reported good experiences. Na Zhao, who gave birth to her son in a London hospital, was impressed at the treatment she received:

The nurses were very kind. Everyone was so kind and friendly. All the time they asked if I felt OK. They gave us the tissues, milk, baby's stuff. They were very nice people. They found interpreters for me. There was a Chinese speaking interpreter in the hospital. She was kind, too. (Na Zhao)

Qiang Lam, who has visited hospitals to help others, has also been impressed with the staff, who he feels are very helpful. Jian Liang, a student, was also positive although he did not understand why he had to wait for a long time before being seen in a hospital when he got sick. Na Zhao and Qiang Lam praised the provision of interpreters in hospital, but Li Huang's experience illustrates the dangers of reliance on non-specialist interpreters:

The health clinic arranged someone to interpret over the phone for me. But over-the-phone interpreting is not always so effective. I was diagnosed with diabetes and cholesterol problems, but the interpreter got it wrong and said I had a liver problem. I was very worried about this and wondered how I could have managed to get this. So I was rather down and later I got other interpreters to help me and eventually it was clear that I had a cholesterol rather than liver problem. (Li Huang)

The difficulties of communication are particularly acute when dealing with mental health problems. As Mei Lin Ma said in the focus group, she has mental health problems and finding the right words to explain their symptoms is extremely difficult. She has attended English, language classes but like many respondents in their 40s, felt that she was too old to learn. She is therefore trapped, increasingly isolated and depressed because of her inability to communicate and thus unable to get the support she needs because she is unable to express her needs.

3.3. CHINESE COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS

A network of Chinese community organisations has developed across London. We compiled a list of 96 organisations which appear to be active. We used a range of sources but cannot claim that it is completely accurate: some organizations exist only in name while others are involved in different activities from those in their stated aims. The organisations have a variety of functions: social, cultural and as providers of services and many are involved in several of these.

We compared the distribution of the Chinese population with that of Chinese organisations using data on ethnicity from the 2001 Census (see Figure 5). Most organisations are located in areas with a higher than average concentration of Chinese people. Several are clustered in Westminster which has the highest concentration of Chinese people, especially in Chinatown in the centre of the borough, which remains a focus for both old and new Chinese migrants (Sales et al, 2009).

These organisations have mainly been established by earlier generations of Chinese migrants, predominantly those from Hong Kong who arrived in the 1950s and 1960s and their location reflects patterns of settlement. There is still a small cluster of organisations serving the community living around Limehouse, London's first 'Chinatown'. Particular groups of Chinese people have tended to concentrate in different areas of the city. For example, the Greenwich Vietnam Community Organisation, many of whose members are Chinese, reflects the Vietnam-born population in that area. Many of the earlier generation of migrants have moved out of the centre as they have acquired increasing prosperity so that areas such as Barnet have relatively high concentrations of Chinese people but few Chinese organisations have been established there. There are thus areas with significant populations with no Chinese community organisations.

There are significant differences between the organisations based in central London, around Chinatown, and those outside. The latter serve a predominantly local population and offer a range of services including information and advice and training courses as well as providing a social space where people can meet and engage in Chinese cultural activities such as Mah-jong. As the generation who arrived during the post war period has aged, their services are increasingly focused on the needs of the elderly. The director of one local Centre talked of the social isolation of many of their members whose children had grown up and moved away. They run a luncheon club which has a social function but also provides a much needed nutritious meal since many no longer bother to cook properly at home. The director of another centre explained:

More than 80 per cent of our members are elderly people. They have time to talk [here] and also, from Monday to Friday we have the Luncheon Club and we have activities like health talks and eye tests and birthday parties and English classes and classes of Mandarin and Cantonese for elderly people.

Several centres provide care for elderly clients through a service agreement with the local council. They also work with other specialist organisations like Age Concern. The Greenwich Vietnamese Community Organisation is more oriented to younger people since their migration is more recent. One of their main activities is interpreting and they provide a range of advice services as well as cultural activities

We write letters, take on cases, provide information. We also have a newsletter. Every two months we write a newsletter with issues related to the community. Every year we do a festival to get people together. So we try to keep the cultural side. We also have a Saturday school for the children coming to learn Vietnamese.

The organisations located around Chinatown serve a more London-wide – and sometimes national – clientele. Some of these organisations, such as the Chinese Take Away Association, reflect business interests but others have been formed to support the more needy groups. The London Chinatown Chinese Community Centre was formed in 1980 and in its offices above a Chinese restaurant in the Gerard Street at the heart of Chinatown it serves a 'forgotten' population of those who have spent a life

Fig. 5: Chinese Population* and Chinese Organisations in London Wards

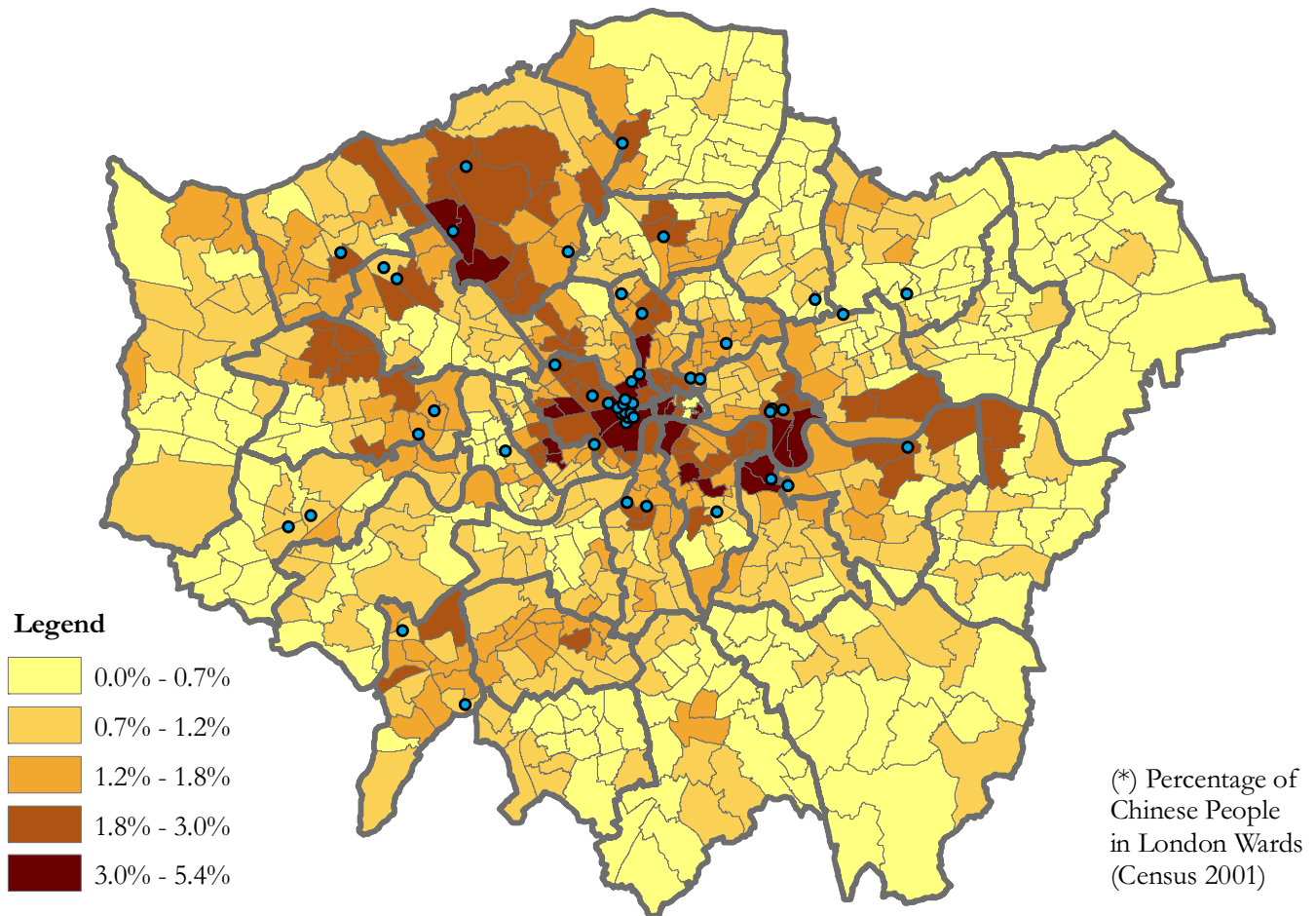
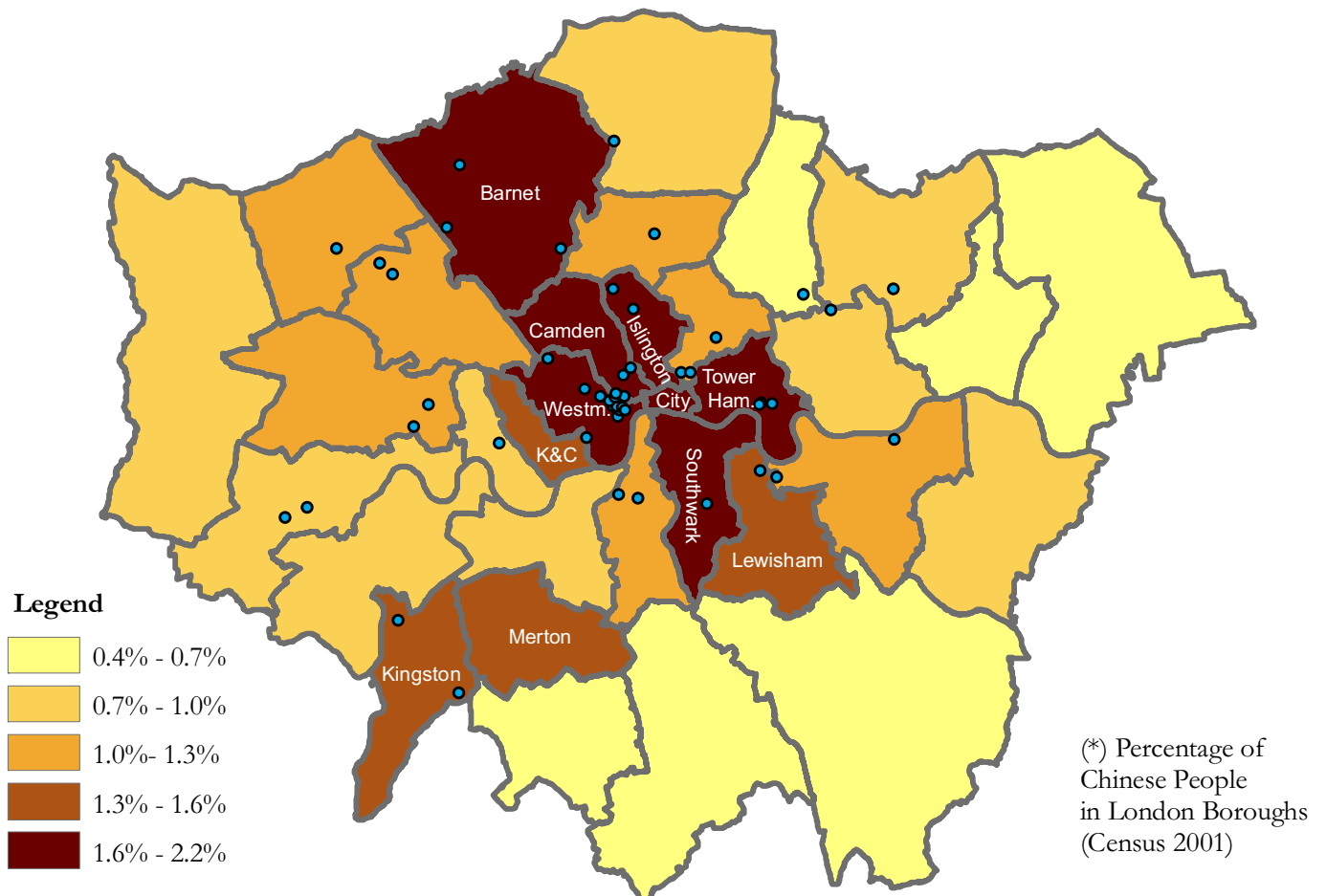


Fig. 6: Chinese Population* and Chinese Organisations in London Boroughs



living and working within a predominantly Chinese environment and are now isolated. It also serves newer migrants.

The organisations in central London also tend to be more specialised. The Chinese Library, part of the local Charing Cross library run by Westminster Council, provides a large stock of Chinese language books as well as information in Chinese. The Central London Chinese Advice Centre provides advice on a range of issues and for example runs a project on domestic violence. The Chinese National Health Living Association provides a range of services to facilitate better access to health care and to raise particular areas of concern affecting Chinese people. The Central London Law Centre has had a Chinese advice worker for many years who specialises in immigration law. He receives clients from across London and many interviewees from other organisations mentioned referring their own clients there. The Chinese Students and Scholars Association has more than 70 branches across the country but does not have an office and communicates mainly through email and the internet.

4.1 THE RESPONSE OF COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS TO NEW MIGRANTS

There has been a mixed response from community organisations to new migration. These organisations were mainly established by and for earlier generations and are not geared to meeting the needs of new migrants. As we discussed above, new migrants tend not to use their services, at least in the early stages, relying on more informal sources of support. This was largely because of lack of knowledge about them and of experience with this kind of organisation. There were, however, other barriers. For some, formal organisations were associated with official status and this could make them reluctant to approach them.

Language is another major difficulty. The majority of new migrants speak Mandarin or other languages (such as Fujianese) from mainland China while older established migrants speak predominantly Cantonese. One key informant spoke of the way that the change in the population was impacting on service providers, with people starting to discuss changing the language that they work with. This is more than just language, however. It also raises issues of power and control as he suggested:

They struggle because whoever controls the board of that community centre will control what type of [services will be provided]. Like a Chinese school: would it be taught in Mandarin? And also the writing, would it be taught in simplified Chinese or classical Chinese? Also what services would be provided for the new migrants from China? And I think this is a big challenge for the Chinese community as a whole in the next 5 to 10 years.

Other differences divide new migrants from the established community. While they may have a common identity as Chinese, they have widely different histories and culture and their migration projects and expectations are often widely divergent. This problem was referred to by one service provider discussing the issue of domestic violence. Referring to new migrants, she said that it is difficult to go through interpreters when dealing with that kind of problem and that is better to speak in their own language. She went on to explain that:

There is also tension between new migrants and older ones because they are more established than these other people and there might be some misunderstandings.

There are wider social and political issues which may make some reluctant to embrace new migrants. They may be seen as harming the respectable image of the Chinese population, the 'model' community with its reputation for success and hard work. This image can also affect those from the older generation who have needs as this informant explained:

The mainstream portrait of the Chinese is very stable. People work very hard in catering; we have got professionals at different levels. (...) But many Chinese have been hidden. I do not agree Chinese are silent or invisible; we are

visible, but we do have a community where a large number is invisible because of their experience, because they are unaware of the system, or because of their education level.

The undocumented status of many new migrants forces them into the margins of society and for some their existence is an embarrassment. Several participants in research on London's Chinatown used terms such as 'dirty' to refer to new migrants (Sales et al, 2009). These tensions have been exacerbated by the changing relations between the Chinese government and the overseas Chinese population. As the PRC government develops economic and political ties with the rest of the world, including Britain, the established Chinese community in Britain have become a key mediator of these relationships. This has made the issue of asylum particularly sensitive since it implies that the PRC is a refugee producing country and therefore that it abuses human rights. People tend not to identify themselves as refugees as one participant in the focus group explained:

We don't call them refugees, this is the problem. I think a lot of Chinese don't call them [refugees]. I was in the Refugee Council a few years ago, and asked [about] them. And it's very minimal the number of people going to the Refugee Council to claim support. I think it's because the mainstream exclude them.

As well as asylum, other issues which new migrants face may be 'taboo'. Several key informants suggested that domestic violence was a major problem for new migrants as well as the more established.

If they are brought up in this kind of traditional upbringing ... the shame of the family should be taken into account. ... There are still people who want to debate whether we should raise the profile of domestic violence, [suggesting] it should be settled within the family or the community, rather than bringing it to the police or social services.

Others spoke of the traditional image of the Chinese community as not asking for help and hiding their problems:

The thing about Chinese is that they are very conscious about what is not good and they try to hide it. For example if somebody has a mental disability that is not mentioned. You don't even dare to go to see a doctor. Second issue is if you have got venereal disease, that is not mentioned as well. Even to your brothers and cousins it is not to be mentioned, nobody has to know. And again if you have cancer, if you are dying, again nobody has to know, because if somebody is dying it is a shame and you don't let people know.

In spite of reluctance from some quarters, many organisations have attempted to adapt to the changing population and to respond to new migrants, for example by recruiting staff able to speak Mandarin. Those providing direct services often felt that they had a duty to help people in need, whoever they were. Typical comments were:

We are a charitable organisation, we cannot turn people away. If a few come and knock on your door you do what you can.

In the work here we embrace everything, we can't turn people away.

This help tends to be ad hoc rather than organised. The manager of one organisation said that they do not provide specific services but just attempt to deal with the problems people present, for example helping asylum seekers with their applications. She said, however, that some on the management committee had complained that she was not paid to provide services for this group. Some organisations have provided specific services as this informant explained:

And sometimes we have workshops which are very popular here, for example for refugee groups on how to apply for work permits or national insurance... legal advice, about legal status and requirements to work or study in the UK. (...) And we also work with other organisations to do readings for children or language classes.

One of the main barriers to this work is a shortage of resources. Their funding arrangements may tie them to serving a local population as the director of one local centre explained: *We primarily provide services for people living in [this borough]. They take priority because we are funded by [the borough].* The funders may require them to keep records of their users which can be problematic when dealing with those who are undocumented. As the director of one local organisation said: *If they are illegal there is not much that I can do.* Those who provided services for new migrants therefore often had to ‘turn a blind eye’ to the undocumented status. As one service provider said:

Although some of them are refugees or some of them we’d need the proof of the address [to register them as clients], we sometimes close one eye to welcome them to (...) because these are the people who need the service most.

Shortage of resources meant that some did not attempt to publicise their services more widely because they were already overwhelmed with existing clients as the director of a local organisation said:

We do not really publicise outside. We are a small organisation. Every morning we have 10-20 people. Because of that we not really feel to publicise our organisation. When we do that many more people come and we are not really funded for this.

There are also legal restrictions on the type of services they can offer. Organisations giving legal advice on immigration issues now have to be registered with the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC). This is costly and requires training to qualify so most organisations give only limited advice (signposting) and refer cases to specialised centres. As the director of a centre said, there were able to provide only general advice and ‘*when we get to the law we do not do much because we are not allowed to do much.*’

These restrictions meant that while some organisations tried to respond to new migrants if they came to them, they did not actively seek them out. They were thus not aware of the problems that they faced, as two of our informants put it:

I’d say these organisations are not speaking to the real people (...) they might speak to the people from organisations like myself (...) but we need organisations to speak to the people and to their real problems.

Service providers are not really in touch with the things on the ground. They are not seeing things. They operate in a vacuum.

They spoke of the difficulties of reaching new migrants who tend to live in their own small groups with very little contact with the outside world. This chimes with the experience of many of our participants. Some described highly isolated lives, often confined to their workplace and with little time after work for anything but eating and sleeping. They were unlikely to find out about community centres but as one service provider suggested, could be reached by other means:

They all go the [Chinese] supermarkets to do their shopping! Once a client came here because he had read an article about us in the newspaper; and I asked “where you got the newspaper” and he said “I say it in the supermarket”. No matter where they go, they have to do the food shopping for Chinese food.

In the case of couples where the man is working it may be easier for the woman to seek help as one advice worker suggested:

The husband goes to find a job and does the job and that's it. The wife has to do everything else. So they have to see us with the child in a buggy, filling housing forms, DSS forms, educational problems, racial harassment. It is women who take up a lot of these issues. And the husbands just work 15 hours a day in a Chinese restaurant and that's it.

People were more likely to go to community organisations after they had found their feet a little and started to encounter problems:

We only come in when they are already settled here, and somehow they have lost their job. So they come to us to apply for some benefits they are entitled to. And also if they feel they are isolated or are not in touch with the outside world, they would come to us and speak about themselves, they join some activities.

Thus a combination of legal, financial and social issues restrict the services on offer to new migrants as well as the willingness and ability of new migrants to take up those services which are available. In spite of these difficulties, however, many of the organisations which we encountered during the research were attempting to respond to the needs which were presented and some of their experience and advice point to particular issues which could be developed more generally.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Our research aimed to explore the variety of experiences of new Chinese migrants. Some of our participants were able to take advantage of the economic and social opportunities offered in London to widen their experience through employment and study. The research focused, however, mainly on the problems of the more vulnerable. In particular we highlighted the experience of Chinese people living in London who have insecure legal status and who experience intense exclusion, with no prospect of moving out of the twilight world of illegality. They are caught in a kind of limbo, confined to poor jobs and often working extremely long hours. Unable or frightened to access services such as health and living in overcrowded conditions, they cannot live openly in Britain. They have no realistic possibility of earning the money they need to allow them to return to China but they live in constant fear of detection and deportation.

People in this situation had often made huge sacrifices in order to come to Britain. They have generally paid large sums of money to facilitate their journey and their entry to Britain and may remain separated from their family for many years. Few had made much preparation for life in Britain, since they expected it to be temporary, and had little information about what to expect when they arrived. Both men and women had undertaken these risky journeys, often in middle age and some of them spoke of their own lives as if they were almost over. Their purpose in life had become to support their families and to give their children a future. Their stories often told of great stoicism and resilience in the face of deprivation and isolation.

The reasons for their migration lay in their individual circumstances and in many cases economic pressures were combined with a desire to escape what they saw as repressive conditions. The broader context for their movement, however, was the restructuring of China's economic and political system and the uneven impact this has on the lives of its people. Most of those who migrate are not refugees in the narrow definition of the term embodied in the Geneva Convention, but their migration can nevertheless be described as forced. This movement is not likely to be halted by the global recession which will continue to impoverish large groups of people in China.

Immigration policy in Britain has become increasingly selective, welcoming those perceived as highly skilled while excluding others without marketable skills or qualifications or insufficient language skills. Thus the rights and status of Chinese migrants are highly diverse. Some of our participants had

secure legal status and access to formal employment and a range of services, while others entered clandestinely or with forged papers. Because of their undocumented status they were forced into low paid, often extremely arduous, work often within an environment which kept them isolated from the wider society. They had limited access to support and services and relied on informal networks – often themselves exploitative – to gain entry to Britain and to find work and accommodation. In spite of the difficulties, some of our participants had been able to move from being undocumented to more secure status, including British citizenship. The new rules for gaining access to citizenship, however, have made this transition harder.

Even those who had established legal status in Britain and who were in professional occupations felt that there were barriers to their integration. In particular they had trouble in finding suitable employment and several perceived that they were discriminated against in employment and through the immigration system. Even those who were well settled economically encountered difficulties in mixing socially with British people and tended to feel that they were ‘outsiders’ in British society.

As the recession deepens, immigration policy is likely to become still tighter. Already the government has asked the Migration Advisory Committee to investigate ways of reducing the dependence on immigrant labour in occupations such as food processing and agriculture, two areas in which Chinese labour has been concentrated. While the route to employment is made more difficult, few of those who apply for asylum succeed in gaining refugee status, a proportion which has declined as Britain’s relations with China become closer their numbers. Punitive policies towards asylum seekers and restrictions on access to employment and other rights such as English language classes prevent them from building connections to British society while their asylum claim is being heard and reduces the prospect of integration and inclusion for those eventually granted asylum. Those whose claim is rejected, and others who are undocumented either because they entered clandestinely or became undocumented after arrival, are consigned to long term exclusion. While they have no legal right to stay they are likely to remain for the long term if not permanently. Many of our participants had lived in Britain for many years in this situation. For those with children living in this country, the isolation and exclusion in which their parents live is perpetuated to the next generation.

This new group of migrants remain largely distant from the established community. Most Chinese organisations were established to meet the needs and aspirations of earlier generations and a complex combination of legal, financial and social reasons restrict the services available to new migrants. New migrants on the other hand may be reluctant to seek support due to lack of information and lack of trust. While language is an obvious barrier, there are deeper reasons which prevent them from interacting. On the other hand, Chinese migrants are generally reluctant to seek help from other non-Chinese organisations, such as the Refugee Council.

There is an urgent need for policies to support this group. More funding is necessary for services in particular the provision of information about their rights. It is also important to make visible the issues faced by this group within the wider community. We discuss these issues further in the recommendations below.

At the same time as responding to the needs of this group and helping them to cope better with the situation, it is important to address the broader policy agenda which keeps them in the limbo needs to change. The broad global economic and political structures which create the imperative to migrate are clearly not easy to change. At the national level, however, there is a need for a rethink of the immigration policy regime. The current campaign for an amnesty for undocumented workers is one important sign that the issue is being recognised by important groups in society.² While the campaign is aimed at a relatively restricted group of migrants who have shown themselves to be ‘deserving’ through their record of work and legal behaviour, it does seek to move beyond the narrow policy agenda epitomised by demands for ‘British jobs for British workers’. Attempting to raise these policy issues may seem to be unrealistic in the current climate. We would, however, suggest that on the contrary it is unrealistic as well

² <http://www.strangersintocitizens.org.uk/>

as unethical not to raise them, since current policies are reproducing serious problems of exclusion which undermine social cohesion and will produce major social and economic costs.

5. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Immigration policy

There is a need for public debate on immigration policy and its implications for human rights and socioeconomic inclusion. This issue clearly impacts not only on new Chinese migrants but also on migrants from elsewhere. The following issues in particular emerged in the study as of particular importance to Chinese migrants:

- restrictions on access to employment by asylum seekers which force many into undocumented work; and the separation of asylum seekers from the mainstream benefit system
- restrictions on access to health care for those with insecure status (e.g. ‘failed’ asylum seekers);
- the increasing selectivity of labour migration policy which has reduced access to the labour market for unskilled workers. Providing paths to legal status for those with undocumented status, including consideration of an amnesty for undocumented workers, needs to be fully debated.
- The derogation on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) which allows immigration policy to override human rights considerations.

2. Education and training

- The provision of accessible ways of providing language classes should be a priority. Asylum seekers should regain access to free publicly provided ESOL classes. Community organisations and other service providers should consider how they could increase the provision and take up of English classes through, for example, providing them at flexible hours. Classes also need to be appropriate for individual needs, for example to meet the needs of those with limited literacy and educational skills as well as for those who need to acquire higher level language skills;
- Training should be available to allow people to use and develop existing skills and to develop new skills, for example in building trades, computer skills.

3. Information and advice

- Information in Chinese and English on for example employment rights, basic legal advice on immigration, access to health needs to be more widely available;
- The needs of those who are not literate in Chinese or English need to be addressed through the provision of face to face advice and interpreters;

- Publicity should be expanded in areas where new migrants may access it, including leaflets, websites could be further explored;
- The use of Chinatown as a centre for advice and information could be developed, for example through distribution of leaflets providing information and advice about rights and about agencies (Chinese and non-Chinese) which provide advice and support.

4. Chinese organisations

- There is a need for statutory support for Chinese organisations to help them provide services for new migrants, for example language classes; interpretation and advocacy especially with health services and information and advice;
- Chinese community organisations need to respond to the needs of new migrants through e.g. employing Mandarin speaking workers and developing relevant services and directing publicity to new migrants;
- The use of volunteers, including for example students and service users, to help provide translation, interpretation and other services, should be explored and developed by Chinese community organisations.

5. Recognising the needs of Chinese people

- The needs of Chinese asylum seekers and refugees need to be recognised by organisations working with these groups;
- The availability of Chinese speakers within organisations such as Law Centres and CABs should be encouraged and expanded.

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APPENDIX 1

Profiles of individual interviewees

1. **Fang Wu** (F) is in her early 40s from North Eastern China. She arrived in London in 1997 to study for a Masters degree and is now working in a university. She is a British citizen.
2. **Xia Ying Zheng** (F) is in her early 50s and from Beijing. She arrived in London in 2002. She is divorced. She has permanent leave to remain and is unemployed.
3. **Na Zhao** (F) is 30 and from Fujian, China. She arrived in London in 2003. She is divorced and has an 8-month old baby with a new partner who lives elsewhere in Britain. She has submitted an asylum application and is not employed.
4. **Min Zhang** (F) is single, in her early 40s and from Fujian. She arrived in London in 2002 to study for a Masters in Business Administration. She is self-employed and runs a small training company to teach Chinese language. She has a work permit.
5. **Jing Liu** (F) is in her 40s and from Macao. Her husband is British but she speaks little English. She works in child care and her husband is a technician.
6. **Wei Zhang** (M) is in his 30s and from mainland China. His first language is Mandarin but he also speaks Cantonese and English. He came through the Highly Skilled Migrant programme and is single.
7. **Li Huang** (F) is 42 years old and from Shenyang City, Northwest China. She arrived alone in London in 2001 and claimed asylum. She now has refugee status. She divorced in China and married again in London in 2006 to a British citizen. She is a homecare worker.
8. **Jing Yuan** (F) is in her 30s from Northeast China. She arrived in London in May 2007. She is divorced and has a child who lives in China. She came with a 'business visa' and is now employed as an Herbal Medicine practitioner.
9. **Li Chen** (F) is in her 40s and from Fujian, China. She came to London in 2002 to visit her younger brother. She is married with one small child and lives with her family in London. She is a housewife and her husband is employed in low paid work. She has applied for Permanent Leave to Remain.
10. **Qiang Lam** (M) is in his 50s and from North China. He arrived in London in 2001 and his wife and children are still in China. He has temporary leave to remain and was employed in an unskilled occupation.
11. **Jun Zhou** (M) is 50 years old and from China. He arrived in London in 2002 as an asylum seeker and was granted refugee status. His wife and son still live in China. He is unemployed.
12. **Yang Liu** (M) is 59 years old and from North China. He arrived in London in 2001 with a work permit. His wife and son live in China. He worked as a dustman before retiring due to health reasons.

13. **Yong Zheng** (M) is in his 20s and from Indonesia. He came to London in 2004 on a science and engineering graduate scheme and is employed in a professional occupation. He is single.
14. **Jie Huang** (M) is from Hong Kong and speaks Cantonese and English. He is a British citizen. He came to London in 2004 and is unemployed.
15. **Lei Yuan** (M) is in his 40s and from North China. He arrived in London in 2001 as an asylum seeker. He is married and his family lives in China. His asylum application has been rejected and he is unemployed though does casual work.
16. **Yan Wang** (F) is in her 50s and from Heilongjiang, Northeast China. She is divorced and has one child in China. She arrived in London in 2005 with a 2-year work permit. She is now undocumented and works as a Chinese medicine doctor.
17. **Tao Wu** (M) is 30 years old and from Fujian. He is single. He arrived in London in 2001 as an asylum seeker but his application has been rejected. He does casual work as a cook in London restaurants.
18. **Juan Zhou** (F) is in her 40s and from China. Both her husband and child live in China. She arrived in London in 2005 with a 'Business Visa' in order to look for work. She is undocumented and unemployed.
19. **Chao Yang** (M) is in his 40s and from North China. His wife and son live in China. He arrived in London in 2002 with a 'Business Visa'. He is undocumented and works in a Tou-fu factory.
20. **Yan Yang** (F) is in her 40s from Tianjin, North China. Both her husband and child live in China. She arrived in London in 2003 with a tourist visa but planned to find work. She is now undocumented and unemployed.
21. **Ming Li** (M) is in his 40s from North China and his wife and child live in China. He came to London in 2001 because he got into trouble for contravening the one child policy. He did not apply for asylum and is undocumented and unemployed.
22. **Ping Zeng** (M) is in his 30s and from North China. His wife and child live in China. He has a sister living in Northern Ireland. He arrived in London in 2004 with a 'Business Visa'. He is undocumented and unemployed.
23. **Gang Wong** (M) is in his 40s and from Northern China. His wife and child live in China. He arrived in the UK in 2006 with a Business Visa. He is undocumented and works in construction.
24. **Xiu Lan Zeng** (F) is in her 40s and from Hailongjiang, Northeast China. She is divorced and has one child who lives in China. She arrived in the London 2001 with a Business Visa and is now undocumented and unemployed.
25. **Feng Song** (M) is in his early 20s from mainland China and single. He arrived in London in 2002 on a Student Visa. At the time of the interview he had just completed a BSc. in Computer Science.
26. **Liang Lin** (M) is in his 30s and from China. He is undocumented and unemployed.

27. **Bin Ma** (M) is in his 40s and from mainland China. He is single and arrived in London in 2005 as an asylum-seeker. He is awaiting a decision on his application and is unemployed
28. **Gui Ying Li** (F) is in her 40s from Zhejiang, China. She is divorced and has one child who lives in China. She arrived in the UK in 2007 with a 'Business Visa'. At the time of the interview she was undocumented and unemployed.
29. **Ya Song** (F) is in her 50s from China and is divorced with no children. She arrived in London in 2007 as an asylum seeker and now has refugee status. She is unemployed.
30. **Jian Liang** (M) is in his 20s and a student from Taiwan. His first language is Cantonese. He arrived in 2000 with a Student Visa and a scholarship from the Taiwanese government.
31. **Shu Ming Chen** (M) is in his 40s and from China. His wife and child live in China. He arrived in the UK in August 2006 with a Business Visa and is now undocumented and unemployed.

Notes

1. All names are pseudonyms
2. Since Chinese names may not be familiar to some readers, the sex of participants is indicated by M or F
3. The characteristics refer to the time of the interview. Some of these may have changed since then.

APPENDIX 2

Organisations involved in interviews and focus groups

Camden Chinese Community Centre

Central London Community Law Centre

Charing Cross Chinese Library

Chinese Association of Tower Hamlets

Chinese Information and Advice Centre

Chinese Mental Health Association

Chinese National Healthy Living Association

Chinese students and scholars association

Christian Centre for Gambling Rehabilitation

Greenwich Vietnam Community Association

East London Chinese Community Centre

Hackney Chinese Community Association

Haringey Chinese Community Association

Lewisham Chinese Community Association

Lambeth Chinese Community Centre

London Chinatown Chinese Community Centre

London Chinese Community Network

Min Quan

North London Chinese Association

